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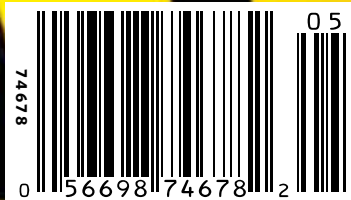
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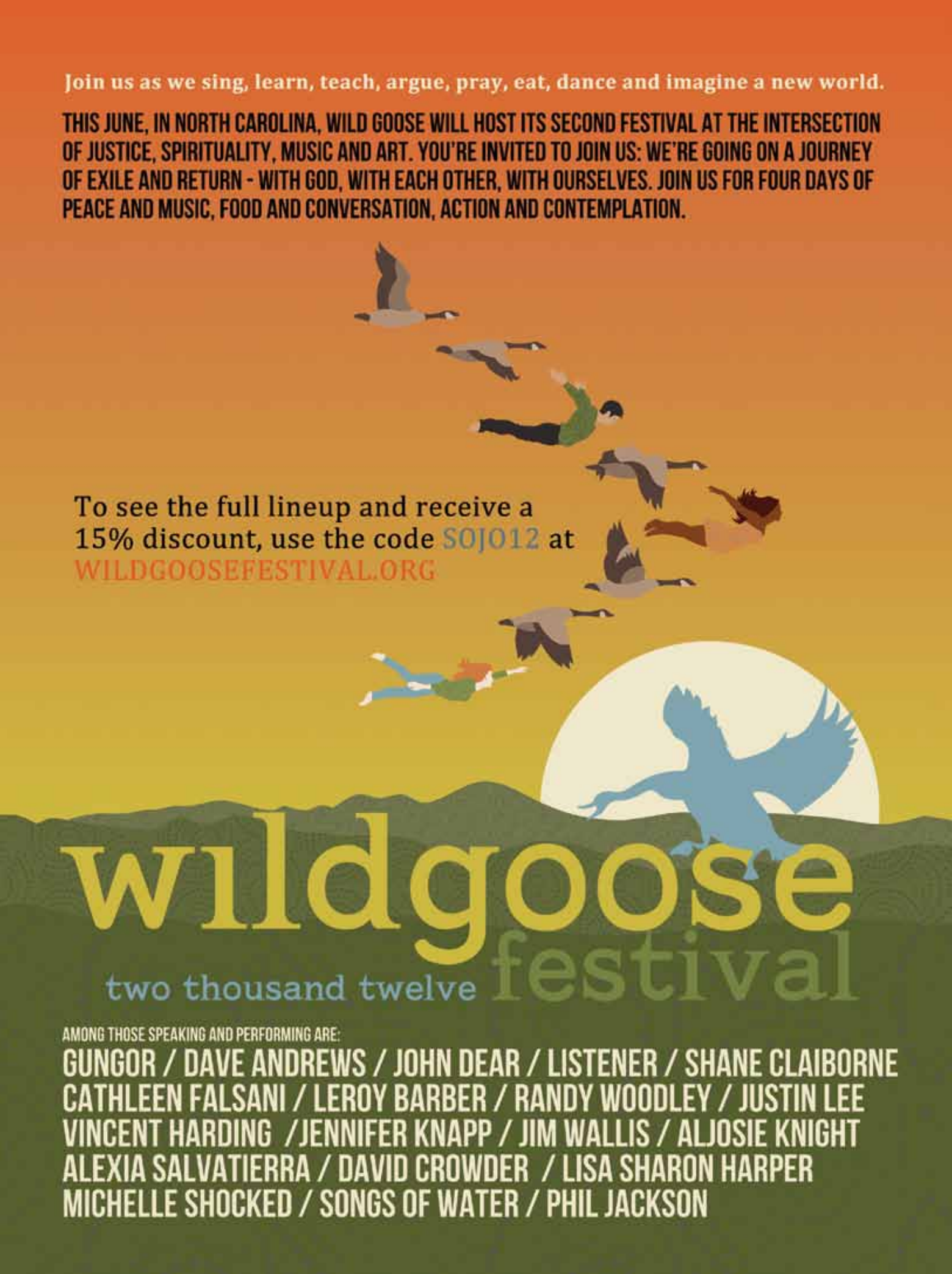
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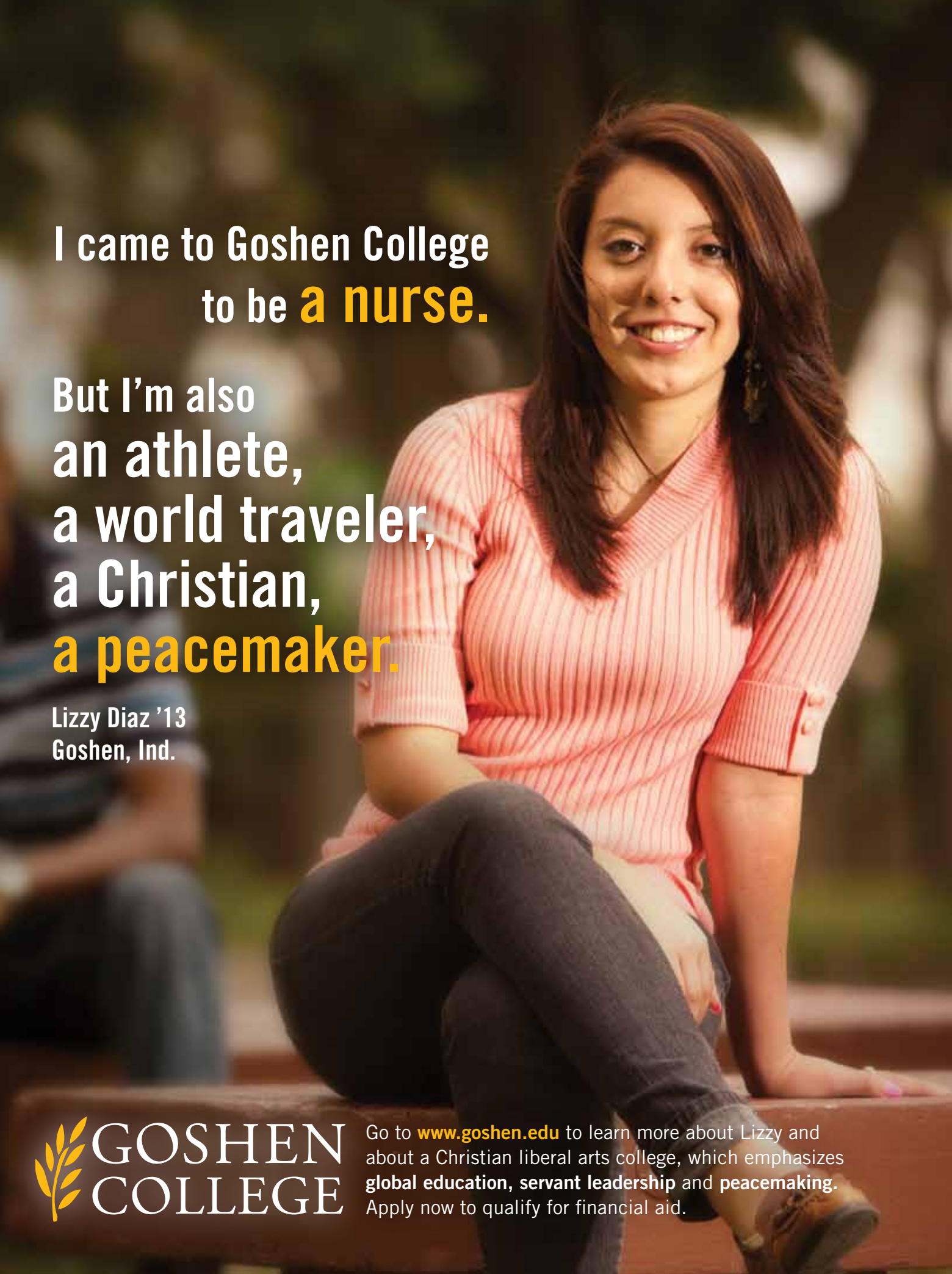
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Food-related coverage in this issue was supported by ELCA World Hunger (www.elca.org/hunger).



I came to Goshen College
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"I'M GONNA SIT at the welcome table," goes the old spiritual—but any time we sit down to eat, there are far more guests at the table than the ones we see.

There are the farm workers, many of them immigrants, who did the hard work of harvesting the food before us. As Sojourners' immigration fellow Ivone Guillen writes, even as the U.S. literally feeds off immigrants' cheap labor, it denies far too many of them legal status to do the work in which they take pride, or to live united with their families. Also at the table with us, as Mississippian Danny Duncan Collum explores, are the social heritage and health of our communities. The American South's generations-long history of manual labor and rich-poor division produced a culinary culture which, in today's sedentary

world, has turned into a disaster writ very large on people's bodies. Collum explores how many people—for example, Rev. Michael O. Minor, the Mississippi Baptist pastor who banned fried chicken from his church's picnics—are finding that eating isn't just an individual activity: It takes both a community and a moral vision to move toward a healthier table. Ellen Davis paints an even bigger picture in her rich reading of God as a farmer in Psalm 65, which means we are called not just to thank God for our daily bread but also to imitate God's work of caring for creation.



In this issue we're also delighted to welcome *Sojourners* writers past and present. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, managing editor from 1976 to 1980, shares insights from his recent visit to Cuba, while cover feature author

Duncan Collum is a former associate editor and longtime writer of our "Eyes & Ears" column. Former interns Richard Vernon and Betsy Shirley return to our pages with, respectively, an interview with novelist Nick Harkaway and a profile of Gamaliel director Ana Garcia-Ashley, the first woman of color to head a national community organizing network. We're glad to invite you to pull up a seat to the community meal! ■

Letters

DON'T MOURN—FACT CHECK

I am reading the March issue of *Sojourners* and want to correct a small error in "Do Not Grow Weary or Lose Heart," by Vincent Harding. The quote "Don't mourn. Organize," attributed to Mother Jones in the article, was actually an admonition from Wobbly songwriter Joe Hill—born Joseph Hillstrom—shortly before his execution in Utah on trumped-up murder charges that were designed to cripple the labor movement. Mother Jones' most famous admonition was "Raise more hell, and less corn," given to the miners in West Virginia, urging them to demonstrate more and drink less.

John Patterson

Harbor Springs, Michigan

RESISTING PRISON PROFITEERS

Thank you for printing Michelle Alexander's commentary "When the Spirit Says Go" in your March issue. Due in large part to Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*, more and more people are coming to understand—and resist—how mass incarceration devastates communities of color, locking up millions and relegating those branded as criminals to a lifetime of legalized discrimination.

Though our movement is getting bigger, we face incredible challenges. We are

The phrase "What are the gifts?" from Vincent Harding is a wonderful challenge: In these times of blowback and inadequate leadership, there is hope.

—Richard Worthen, Alton, Illinois

up against centuries of prejudice and economic subjugation, as well as a private prison industry that sees prisoners as dollar signs. Companies like GEO Group Inc. lobby for "tough on crime" legislation and harsh immigration laws to keep our increasingly privatized prisons and detention centers full and lucrative. And too few people are aware that investors such as Wells Fargo are funding them.

One way to resist is to refuse to support those who profit from this system. That is why we at the Criminal Injustice Committee of Occupy D.C. are asking organizations and individuals of conscience to boycott Wells Fargo. You can learn about our campaign at www.wellsfargoboycott.com.

Melanie S. Pinkert
Washington, D.C.

SLAVERY TODAY

Rose Marie Berger's article "Slaves in Our Family" (February 2012) is a reminder to us that slavery in our country didn't end with

the Emancipation Proclamation.

I retired four years ago after running a ministry for ex-offenders and homeless individuals. It wasn't unusual for young men to come to me after escaping from a farm labor camp. They told me that someone pulled up to the homeless shelter where they were staying and offered them good-paying jobs. The homeless men were then taken to a farm labor camp where they were provided with drugs, alcohol, and the services of prostitutes, which they paid for out of their meager earnings. Within a short time they were in debt to the leaders of the camp.

If they tried to leave, they were pistol-whipped or beaten. The men who came to me were the lucky ones who were able to escape.

Stan Grenn
Jacksonville, Florida

Letters, letters@sojo.net or *Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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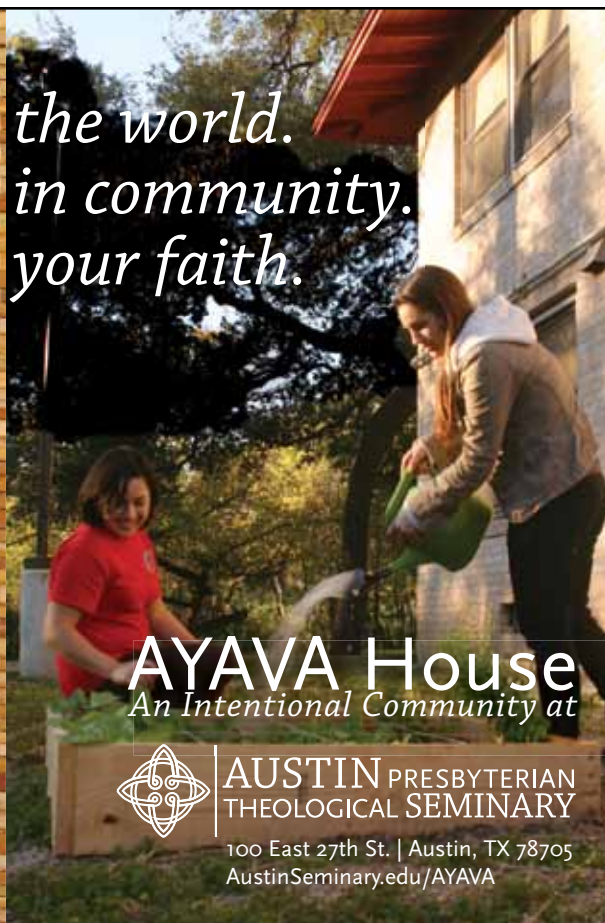


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BY JIM RICE

Obesity in a World of Hunger



IT'S EASY TO make the assumption that obesity is an individual problem, having more to do with personal health than with social justice. After all, people make their own decisions about what they put on their plates and how much they put in their mouths.

But many people—and many churches—are starting to see not only the public health consequences of the obesity epidemic, but also the broader forces that contribute to it.

And “epidemic” isn’t too strong a word for the growing problem of obesity. The numbers in the U.S. are unsettling, with startling increases over the past few decades. But the worst may be yet to come, as billions of people in formerly developing

officials as primarily a lack of adequate calories, and thus the response was a singular focus on increased outputs. But the diagnosis was at best simplistic—even decades ago, in a time of extensive famine, hunger was rooted as much in poverty and powerlessness as in a literal shortage of food.

That’s even truer today. The world produces enough food to feed everyone—17 percent more calories per person than 30 years ago, according to the World Hunger Education Service, enough to provide everyone in the world with sufficient nourishment. The main cause of hunger is still poverty (and the economic and political systems that *cause* poverty), along with war, racism, and, increasingly, the effects of climate change.

And while undernutrition is still the main hunger issue in the developing world, obesity is more and more being recognized as another form of malnutrition.

WHILE OBESITY IS undeniably related to a person’s lifestyle, personal choices around food cannot be separated from the political, social, and economic context. As De Schutter put it, “Our food systems are making people sick ... we must tackle the systemic problems that generate poor nutrition in all its forms.”

Those systemic problems, which result in an overabundance of cheap, over-processed food, include everything from ag policies (such as the promotion, and often subsidizing, of soybeans and cereals—especially corn—over fruits and vegetables) to the marketing of unhealthy foods to children and adults. (U.S. companies spent \$8.5 billion advertising food, candy, and beverages, not even counting alcohol, in 2010.)

Globalization, of course,

magnifies it all worldwide—developing countries export high-quality food to rich countries and import refined grains. Poor families who in the past may have eaten a diet high in fruits and vegetables from local farms now rely mainly on starchy staples and ingest higher proportions of fats and sugars. As De Schutter put it, “Urbanization, supermarketization, and the global spread of modern lifestyles have shaken up traditional food habits. The result is a public health disaster.” In other words, along with the super-processed food, we’re exporting diabetes and heart disease, and it’s not surprising that the worst effects are on people who are poor, particularly poor women.

The U.N. report named five strategies to move toward a more sustainable approach to nutrition: 1) tax unhealthy products; 2) regulate foods high in saturated fats, salt, and sugar; 3) crack down on junk food advertising; 4) overhaul misguided agricultural subsidies that make certain ingredients cheaper than others; and 5) support local food production so that consumers have access to healthy, fresh, and nutritious foods. None of those actions will be easy to accomplish in a domestic and international system where profit trumps health justice every step of the way.

The good news is that people, including people of faith, are starting to pay attention. There’s a growing recognition that what we put in our bodies isn’t just about ourselves; it has everything to do with our relationships with our communities and our broader world—human and natural. Food connects us, in profound ways we’re only beginning to understand, to the beautiful, fragile, precious web of life. ■

Jim Rice is editor of Sojourners. Hearts & Minds is on hiatus during editor-in-chief Jim Wallis’ sabbatical.

Billions of people are being globalized into “fast-food nation” lifestyles.

countries are gradually globalized into “fast-food nation” lifestyles.

The transition has already begun. According to a recent U.N. report, more than 1 billion people around the world are overweight. Each year excess weight and obesity cause 2.8 million deaths—65 percent of the world’s population now lives in countries where being overweight kills more people than being underweight. And it’s only going to get worse: According to Olivier De Schutter, the U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food, by 2030 as many as 5.1 million people in poor countries will die each year before the age of 60 from unhealthy diets and diet-related diseases such as diabetes, 1.3 million more than today.

The definitions of hunger and malnutrition are changing, and as a result so are the responses—but perhaps not quickly enough.

In the 1960s and ’70s, the cause of hunger was diagnosed by most

Muzaffar Salim/AP



Syria's Murderous Stalemate

A Syrian woman weeps at a January prayer service at Holy Cross Church in Damascus for the more than 5,400 killed since violence broke out in March 2011. Thousands attended the service conducted by Christian and Muslim leaders. Regarding ongoing violence in Syria, Maronite Archbishop of Damascus Samir Nassar said, "It is the little people who suffer ... Syria appears to be locked in a situation of murderous stalemate."

By Yvonne Yen Liu

Injustice in the Food Chain

Low-wage work and racial inequity are rife in jobs that move food to your table.

IN THE U.S. food supply chain, 20 million workers labor in hazardous conditions for low wages. Uylonda Dickerson was one of them. Dickerson, a 39-year-old single African-American mother in Will County, Illinois, would show up every morning, hoping for work, at one of the many warehouses that litter the landscape of her area southwest of Chicago.

The Chicago region, once a proud steel and manufacturing hub, is now a major portal for food and other commodities produced cheaply overseas, transported by rail from West Coast ports, and slated for destinations in the Midwest or on the East Coast. Ironically, the workers—more than 80 percent of whom are African American or Latino—who were displaced from good, union jobs when factories closed are now employed in bad, temporary jobs, moving goods made in China.

The warehousing and storage industry, which feeds big-box retailers such as

Walmart, relies on a pool of temporary laborers. This exempts employers from paying living wages or providing basic benefits and workers' compensation; it also short-circuits worker attempts to organize into a union. Their costs of living are then displaced onto society. One in four warehouse

toll: "My body still is not the same," she told a Huffington Post reporter. "I still have aches and I still have pains. I have migraines because of the stress I went through."

People of color are particularly concentrated in the lowest-paid sectors of the food chain: agricultural labor and retail service,

The warehousing industry relies on temporary laborers, exempting employers from paying living wages.

workers relied on public assistance to survive, according to Warehouse Workers for Justice's report "Bad Jobs in Goods Movement."

On days when there was work, Dickerson was not paid an hourly rate, but by how many trailers she unloaded. She was sexually harassed by male colleagues and harangued by her supervisors for taking bathroom breaks. The job took a physical

according to "The Color of Food," a recent report by the Applied Research Center. At all stages of the supply chain—production, processing, distribution, and service—people of color make less than white workers. In the distribution sector (which encompasses warehouse and storage workers such as Dickerson), the typical yearly wage for a white worker is \$42,234, while a worker of color earns only \$27,452.

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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For women, there's an additional penalty: Women of color make 30 to 50 cents less for every dollar earned by a white male worker. Food chain workers are also particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment; for example, in a 2010 survey of women farm workers in California's Central Valley, 80 percent reported experiencing such harassment.

A manager in the logistics industry has the potential to earn a family-sustaining wage, but, with only one managerial position for every 100 warehouse jobs, few opportunities exist for warehouse workers to move up the career pathway. Not many of those opportunities go to people of color: Whites make up 74 percent of managers and 85 percent of chief executives. Women of color are even rarer in the executive class, making up just 10 percent of all managers.

Much of the labor in the food system

cannot be outsourced—a key leverage point for worker advocates. Across the country, warehouse and storage workers are contesting the precarious conditions in which they labor. Warehouse Workers for Justice has filed nine lawsuits and numerous complaints with state and federal government demanding enforcement of labor laws. Advocates representing warehouse workers in California's Inland Empire are pursuing similar measures. And Uylonda Dickerson is now an organizer with Warehouse Workers for Justice, working to shine a light on the conditions for the workers who stock the grocery shelves at Walmart. ■

Yvonne Yen Liu co-authored "The Color of Food" and is a senior researcher at the Applied Research Center, a racial justice think and action tank that publishes Colorlines.com.

By Robert Brenneman

Kicking a Bad Habit

Many in Central America say it's time to consider decriminalizing drugs.

IN LATE FEBRUARY, Guatemala's foreign minister, megachurch-pastor-turned-politician Harold Caballeros, announced that he had formally raised the topic of drug legalization with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. That same month, Guatemalan Vice President Roxana Baldetti started a Central American whirlwind tour to raise the issue of legalization with heads of state from El Salvador to Panama.

Panamanian President Martinelli, the leftist administration of Mauricio Funes in El Salvador, Costa Rica's President Laura Chinchilla, and Honduran President Porfirio Lobo have agreed to meet to discuss the topic, though Baldetti cautioned that results "will not come overnight." Also joining the dialogue is Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, the formerly Marxist president whose political resurrection coincided with a conversion to socially conservative Christian faith. Ortega professed to "fully share the concern" of the Guatemalan government. Caballeros' conversation with Secretary Clinton went nowhere, of course; the Obama administration is not about to act on such a hot-button issue, especially in the midst of an election year.

But the move was gutsy for a Guatemalan

administration that was only in its second month of power. So far, most Latin American presidents have broached the topic of legalization only *after* leaving office. Former presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil and Vicente Fox of Mexico, both pro-business allies of the U.S. while in power, have been outspoken proponents of legalization in recent years and were members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, whose 2011 report urged "experimentation ... with models of legal regulation of drugs." The emergence of such key proponents has likely opened up new political space to discuss what had been largely off-limits in formal U.S.-Latin America diplomacy talks.

And it should come as little surprise. The voracious demand for illegal drugs in the United States, and the resulting lucrative opportunities in the drug trade, have helped create vast ungovernable spaces in Latin America. One example: In the northern coastal region of Atlántida in Honduras, there were an astronomical 131 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in 2010. A report released in February by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars stated the problem succinctly: "In many

From the Archives

May 1980

A Pastor's Last Sermon

BEAUTIFUL is the moment in which we understand that we are no more than an instrument of God; we live only as long as God wants us to live; we can do only as much as God makes us able to; we are only as intelligent as God would have us be. To place all these limitations in God's hands, to recognize that without God we can do nothing, is to have a sense, my beloved brothers and sisters, that a transcendent meaning of this time in El Salvador means to pray much, to be very united with God. ...

Do you see how life recovers all of its meaning? And suffering then becomes a communion with Christ, the Christ that suffers, and death is a communion with the death that redeemed the world? Who can feel worthless before this treasure that one finds in Christ, that gives meaning to sickness, to pain, to oppression, to torture, to marginalization? No one is conquered, no one; even though they put you under the boot of oppression and of repression, whoever believes in Christ knows that he [or she] is a victor and that the definitive victory will be that of truth and justice! ...

We want the government to seriously consider that reforms mean nothing when they come bathed in so much blood. Therefore, in the name of God, and in the name of this long-suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven every day more tumultuous, I beseech you, I beg you, I command you in the name of God: Cease the repression! ■

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador preached this sermon on March 23, 1980, the day before his assassination.



ways, Central American countries are fighting against simple economics." The region's governments are trying to win a battle in which they are constantly outnumbered, outgunned, and outspent by local traffickers called *transportistas* and by Mexican drug cartels, such as the Sinaloa and the Zetas.

It says much about just how far the movement to decriminalize production and transport has come that a former megachurch minister such as Guatemala's Caballeros—a man who made his career as a moral entrepreneur, founding a quasi-evangelical political party called "Vision and Values"—is formally bringing up legalization with his country's colossal neighbor and customer to the north.

Many argue that it is high time that North American people of faith join Caballeros and the members of the Global Commission in admitting the obvious—that the "war on drugs" is "an abject failure." Even though the Obama administration has quietly retired the slogan, the tactics remain the same. U.S. foreign policy continues to be shaped by huge investments in weaponry and intelligence-gathering designed to "disrupt" the drug traffic, costing U.S. taxpayers \$260 million

from 2008 to 2010 in Central America alone. Retiring the drug war won't be an easy sell with American voters, but evidence exists to suggest that there is growing openness to discussing it.

Legalization will not address *all* of the sources of northern Central America's soaring crime rate. Tax reform, increased spending on public education, and campaign finance reform would also help the situation by reducing inequality, expanding opportunity among the poor, and lowering the incentives for political corruption.

But advocates say that we must start somewhere—and that, at a minimum, people in the U.S. owe it to the people of Central America to own up to the role U.S. recreational habits play in eroding democracy and piling up homicide victims in nations to the south. Central American voices are offering a compelling argument that the U.S. can and must kick the drug war habit. ■

Robert Brenneman is assistant professor of sociology at Saint Michael's College, Vermont, and author of Homies and Hermanos: God and Gangs in Central America.

By Phil Blackwell

Not Worth the Gamble

Internet sales of lottery tickets are shortsighted and wrong.

PEOPLE GAMBLE—always have, and always will. But when the state decides to encourage this human tendency and exploit it for its own profit, then we definitely have a moral problem.

In December, the U.S. Justice Department ruled that it is permissible for states to sell lottery tickets online, making it easier for state governments to bilk their citizens. Illinois internet lottery sales were slated to begin in late March. Although the sales are limited to state residents, the greater convenience of internet buying will likely cause more people to try the lottery.

In contrast to a "sin tax" on alcohol and cigarettes, in the case of the lottery the state becomes a pusher of gambling. The government, rather than serving and protecting its people, is "the house," committed to creating

more losers to make more money.

When we follow the advertising money, we discover that the lottery has been sold primarily to the poor and those on fixed incomes: The billboards are in the inner city, not the upscale suburbs. The lottery is promoted in such places with the deceitful promise that a buyer has a good chance to win security for a lifetime.

The Illinois Lottery was started in 1974 and, since 1985, its profits have gone by law to fund public education. In a classic example of "bait and switch," however, legislators put the lottery money into school funding—but redirected the former funds to other parts of the state budget. Public education remains a major concern in Illinois, even as the lottery has added gimmick after gimmick over the years. Today the state

legislature budgets only 75 percent of what is, according to an advisory committee, the minimum acceptable spending per student; it has almost a billion dollars in unmet obligations to the schools.

Some have lamented that the lottery was the beginning of a slippery slope toward permitting more forms of gambling in Illinois. In reality, it's less of a slope than a free fall. Ten casinos have been introduced and there is current back-room negotiation for five more; permission has been granted

With the lottery, the state becomes a pusher of gambling.

for up to 40,000 video gambling machines in bars, truck stops, and veterans' halls; and racetrack owners are asking to install slot machines.

This downward trajectory exacts a high price. Researcher Earl Grinols of Baylor University has isolated public costs for crime, embezzlement, illness, lost workdays, foreclosures, and family disintegration directly attributable to gambling. He found that the public pays more than it gets: Society spends \$3 on such costs for every \$1 of increased tax income or other "social benefit" from gambling.

Internet lottery sales will only aggravate the problem. Gambling machine manufacturers have put enormous sophistication into manipulating the activity of players. The designers' goal is to seduce people into, in industry parlance, "playing to extinction." Now with lottery sales on the internet, every home computer, iPad, and smartphone becomes a machine of deception.

The state government's dependence on lottery sales is cowardly—a way for legislators to avoid honestly calculating the real costs of education, public services, and infrastructure repairs and then calling on citizens to be responsible through a fair tax structure. The Justice Department has given this legislative dodge a bit more cover, but it is a gamble that subverts the common good. ■

Phil Blackwell is senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple.



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Welfare for (Very Rich) Oil Companies

OF THE MANY gifts that the 99 percent award to the 1 percent—the various tax breaks and tributes that have helped push inequality in America to record levels—none are quite as annoying as the subsidies awarded the fossil fuel industry.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders introduced a bill this spring that would trim \$20 billion a year from those payouts to coal and oil and gas companies. Barack Obama, modest almost to a fault, has identified \$5 billion in handouts that he'd like taken away before this year's budget is finalized. Whatever the number, the principle is crucial. Because if we can't agree not to subsidize the fossil fuel industry, I'd submit we pretty much can't agree about anything.

For environmentalists, few things could be more important. Worldwide, it's estimated that global warming emissions could be cut in half if all governments stopped sub-



producing panels, the price will come down, a new industry will be born, and we'll all be better off. It's the same reason we subsidize education—young people don't know what they need to know, so we help them go to college (unless we're Rick Santorum).

carbon emission from heating the atmosphere?) Even if you thought that way, you'd still want to keep the federal government from paying Exxon bonuses every year.

For one thing, there's no group of industries that need the money less. Fossil fuel is the most profitable enterprise humans have ever engaged in, and by large margins. Exxon earned \$41 billion last year,

not quite as much as its \$45 billion record in 2008, but still more money than any other company in the history of money (\$1,300 a second, if you're keep-

ing score). The Koch brothers are the third and fourth richest men in America, thanks to their network of pipelines. Subsidizing people like this is like setting up a special welfare program only for lottery winners. It's like arranging the NBA draft so that the team who wins the title also gets the first-round choice. It's like reserving the parking spaces near the store for Olympic athletes.

And it's even nuttier when you think about why we subsidize things in the first place. We pick things we'd like to be able to do, but aren't good at yet. Say, solar power—if the government helps companies invest in the new technology, they will get better at

always work. Some kids go to college and do nothing but drink beer—the subsidy was wasted. Some solar companies—Solyndra, say—turn out not to be based on sound ideas, and so they fail. Neither case is pretty, but most people understand that you still want to subsidize both college and innovation.

But fossil fuel? We learned how to burn coal in the early 1700s, and oil and gas followed. We're very good at these things now—too good, to judge by the fact that the planet's temperature is rising fast. Subsidizing coal is like finding that beer-drinking college student and paying him to sit in a bar all day and night—it's not just unnecessary, it's ludicrous.

But it does make sense for one group of people—legislators. Having been given small presents (campaign donations) by fossil fuel companies, they in return bestow large presents on those corporations, using our tax dollars. Outside of Congress, huge majorities of Republicans, independents, and Democrats think it's a bad idea; it'll

be interesting to see if that's enough. ■

Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.



Subsidizing coal and oil is like paying a beer-drinking college student to sit in a bar—it's not only unnecessary, it's ludicrous.

siding fossil fuel—something that won't happen unless the U.S. takes the lead.

But let's say for the moment that you don't care about climate change. Let's say you agree with Republican Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma that global warming is impossible because it says in Genesis "that 'as long as the earth remains there will be seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night.' My point is, God's still up there," Inhofe said. "The arrogance of people to think that we, human beings, would be able to change what He is doing in the climate is to me outrageous." (I can't help myself: This is an exceedingly dumb theology. God allows war but prevents

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Tanya Brice, M.S.W., Ph.D.

Associate professor of social work at Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Sustainers Circle member!

Tanya is one of the newest members of the **Sustainers Circle**. Tanya appreciates the way *Sojourners* challenges readers, including her, to integrate their faith into every aspect of their lives. As a professor of social work at a Christian university, Tanya believes that *Sojourners* is a great model for her students, providing a clear, honest picture of the challenges and rewards of a life that takes belief and justice seriously: “It is wonderful to read about how other followers of the way live out their faith.”

As an avid supporter of the mission of *Sojourners*, Tanya felt moved to join the **Sustainers Circle**: “It was not enough just to consume the resources that you make available. It is important to ensure that you are able to continue to do the meaningful work that you do.”

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THE NEW LOOK OF CHURCH
POTLUCKS: Fruit and vegetables
now dominate the fellowship tables
of Oak Hill Baptist Church in
Hernando, Mississippi.



DIET, EXERCISE, AND TEMPLES OF THE HOLY GHOST

From Mississippi to Kentucky coal-mining country, churches are taking on the public health crisis of obesity • by DANNY DUNCAN COLLUM

IS OBESITY A “Southern thing,” like drawling accents, gospel music, and excessive devotion to college football? Well, as a native Southerner, I have to admit that increasingly it looks that way.

Obesity is, of course, a national problem. In 1990, 34 states had obesity rates between 10 and 14 percent, but no state had a 15 percent obesity rate. By 2010 every state in the country was more than 20 percent obese.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), as of 2010 there were 12 states with obesity rates of more than 30 percent. All but one of them are in the South, and that one exception—Michigan—may blame its problem on the many Southern migrants it received during the 1950s and ’60s. And the closer you look, the worse the picture gets. The highest concentrations of obesity were found in six states: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina in the Deep South, and the largely Appalachian states of Kentucky and West Virginia.

The causes of obesity are the same for everyone. You eat too much, you don’t get enough exercise, and you become obese. But why do people eat too much and move too little? As for any human behavior, the causes are complex and ambiguous, but the timing of the obesity outbreak suggests some answers. The upward trend in obesity began in the 1980s and ’90s, when cable TV became widespread in American households, encouraging a couch-potato lifestyle. This was also when the two-income family became the norm. With both parents working full-time, home-cooked meals were often replaced by fat-laden fast-food dinners washed down with giant servings of sugary soda pop. In the subsequent two decades, both of these trends accelerated, with widespread internet access making physical activity even rarer.

From the beginning the obesity epidemic has hit hardest among the poorest Americans. Supermarkets tend to locate where the money is, but fast-food restaurants are eager to locate among the poor, where the “dollar menu” exerts a powerful pull. In addition, exercise is more difficult in a crime-ridden urban environment or in a rural one with few public parks and no sidewalks. And gym fees or exercise equipment simply aren’t a priority for people who can’t pay their electric bills.

The South experienced all of these national trends and at the end came out way ahead in obesity. Partly we can blame that on higher than average Southern poverty rates, but, at some point, the subject of the traditional Southern diet becomes unavoidable. We are, after all, the people

William Wildmer/The New York Times



Rev. Minor was startled by the number of people who were, as he tactfully puts it, “of a special size.”

who invented Kentucky Fried Chicken and Coca Cola. The fact is that, traditionally, we like to eat everything fried, even vegetables. And what we don’t fry, we like to boil with a big hunk of fatty pork, and maybe a little sugar. These Southern peculiarities are rooted in a history of rural poverty. Frying is quicker than baking when you have to get back to the fields, and frying doesn’t heat up the house the way an oven does; before air conditioning, that was a big deal. The extra calories from grease also helped make people feel full when rations were short, and the pork in the vegetables was a bit of protein when there was no other meat on the table.

That way of eating worked for our ancestors. Fifty years ago a life of hard physical labor, in a world without air conditioning, was the norm for most Southerners, African American and white. Now the jobs that required physical labor are gone. In their place is less vigorous service work, or unemployment. We have the same cable or satellite TV and internet as everyone else and the same fast-food chains. In other words, everything about our world changed, except our diet, and that’s why the CDC map of obesity in America glows fire-engine red across the lower tiers.

The good news is that today many Southerners, African American and white, are finding in their Christian faith and their faith communities resources to combat the pressing public health crisis of obesity. As the long-term costs of this plague are sinking in, people are seeing that to change individual behavior also means resisting economic and

cultural forces, a challenge best met in the context of community.

REV. MICHAEL O. MINOR first noticed the obesity epidemic in the mid-1990s, when he returned to the South after several years in the Boston area. Minor, a native of Coldwater, Mississippi, went north to study at Harvard. Back home, he was startled by the number of people who were, as he tactfully puts it, “of a special size.” When he was called to preach at Oak Hill Baptist Church in Hernando, at the edge of the impoverished Mississippi Delta, the issue of obesity and health began to weigh on his conscience.

In a phone interview he told me, “I wanted to do something about this when I became pastor, but in Baptist churches the pastor is elected; that makes it hard for you to get up in the pulpit and tell people, ‘You’re too fat.’ So I came at it through community efforts first. I reactivated the Rising Sun Usher Federation [in the black church, ushers are often influential lay leaders] and started talking about health in that context. Soon we were putting on health fairs, and I slowly got bolder and bolder about raising this with the people.”

Soon Minor began to develop a reputation as “the Baptist preacher who banned fried chicken.” He got a call to meet with Michelle Obama when she came to Mississippi to promote her “Let’s Move” anti-obesity campaign. “People had told her I was the Baptist preacher who banned fried chicken from my church,” he said. “Actually, at that point we hadn’t banned it; we were strongly discouraging it. But finally we said, ‘Why not?’ and made it official: There is no fried chicken on The Hill.”

To Minor, the issue of obesity is a matter of faith, and he presents it that way to his congregation. “In the Hebrew Bible,” he says, “you see this word *shalom*. We do that concept a disservice in English when we call it ‘peace.’ In fact it is about wholeness of mind, body, and soul. Sometimes when Jesus healed people he would say, ‘You’ve been made whole.’ The Bible doesn’t separate the mind, body, and spirit. We’re the ones who cut ourselves up into three parts. To Jesus we are one, and we are called to wholeness.”

“This has really made a difference in our church,” Minor continues. “We have people who are literally half the size they used to be.

Above: Rev. Michael O. Minor brought a new emphasis on health and diet to his Baptist church. At right, a meeting of a “Healthy, Well-Thee, and Wise” group as part of Faith Moves Mountains in Kentucky.

William Widmer/The New York Times

And it's not just those dramatic cases of people who've lost hundreds of pounds. The people who've lost 10 or 20 pounds feel better and are healthier. It adds to their quality of life."

A typical church dinner at Oak Hill today, Minor says, includes "grilled or baked chicken, green beans or greens cooked with turkey neck or with olive oil and seasonings, fresh fruit, maybe some desserts made with Splenda, and water or Crystal Lite to drink instead of soda pop." That menu might not pass muster with whole-food purists, but it does maintain some of the community's traditional foodways, while drastically lowering the fat, sugar, and salt.

To help people exercise, the ushers at Oak Hill marked off the mileage around the church's paved parking lot, so members could use it as a walking track. "We have walking teams at the church now," Minor says. He also tells people, "Park further away from the store and walk. Do things to work exercise into your daily routine. A lot of people can't afford exercise equipment, but anybody can do something. Small things done intentionally can make a big change."

Those small changes at Oak Hill have rippled out, first through Mississippi, and now nationally, through the National Baptist Convention, of which Oak Hill is a member. Minor has been named to head the denomination's HOPE Initiative (Health Outreach and Prevention Education). The main goal for HOPE, he says, is "to get someone in every congregation trained to be a 'health ambassador.' These would be lay people trained for health promotion and health education."

The message needs to come from within the community, Minor says, because "especially in the Mississippi Delta, people hate to see outsiders. The Delta has seen so many researchers come and befriend the people, and then they're gone." It's also best, he says, that health ambassadors not be health-care professionals. "There is a problem in the African-American community," Minor says, "that goes back to the Tuskegee [syphilis] experiments, and it has left a reluctance to deal with the medical establishment. People are suspicious."

INSPIRED IN PART by the success of churches like Oak Hill Baptist, another new initiative is trying to bring



congregation-based preventive health care to the South's other deep pocket of poverty, the predominantly low-income white population of the Appalachian Mountains.

Katie Dollarhide is a Whitesburg, Kentucky, native who serves as project manager for the obesity prevention program at Faith Moves Mountains. They call the program "Healthy, Well-Thee, and Wise." According to Dollarhide, the project "started with a University of Kentucky faculty member, Dr. Nancy Schoenberg, who saw what was happening with African-American churches and wondered if something like that could work in Appalachia, since we, too, have tight-knit communities with churches as the center of life." Faith Moves Mountains is now active in four Kentucky counties—Letcher, Harlan, Knott, and Perry—in the heart of the state's southeastern coal region.

The classes on diet and exercise take place in churches, Dollarhide says, because that's where the people are and "that's where the trust is." The traditional division between body and soul is still a strong one in many Appalachian churches. "The pastor's priority," Dollarhide says, "is to see about people's souls. But I go to a Baptist church, and my pastor says God wants us to take care of ourselves."

Classes teaching about diet and exercise are led by lay health advisers, recruited from among the natural leaders of the community. One of those is Donna Boggs, a former schoolteacher in Harlan County, Kentucky. Even before she was trained as a health adviser, Boggs had gotten the message about diet and exercise. "I am a diabetic myself," she told me, "so I understand people's struggles, and I just hope I can touch one person and maybe prevent the onset of diabetes. I kept my diabetes at bay for 10 years with diet and exercise."

Boggs, who attends a Pentecostal church, says, "As a Christian, I believe that my body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and everything I put into my body or do to my body needs to meet that test. That includes my food and drink and my recreation."

About the causes of Appalachian obesity, Boggs says, "This may be the mountains, but we have the same internet and video games as everybody else. And people eat fast food, too. People here are going to eat fast food and get their hair done, if they don't have money for anything else. You put that on top of the traditional Southern diet and you get a big problem."

Dollarhide sees the health challenges of obesity as simply part of life in a region that faces all kinds of struggles. "Most people here are poor," she says. "Coal miners might make a lot of money, but then they get laid off. So it's hard for everybody here. We are portrayed as ignorant, but we are hardworking people and just as smart as anybody. We will find a way to survive." ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. His latest book is the novel *White Boy*.



GOD THE FARMER

Psalm 65 gives us a unique portrait of a deity who tends the soil, waters its furrows, and crowns the year with a rich harvest • by ELLEN F. DAVIS

THE PSALMS ARE the icons of the Bible. Icons are paintings of Christ or another holy figure used in worship and devotions in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. They are, like the Bible itself, understood to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. The psalms resemble icons in that they are the most visual part of the Bible: They speak to our religious imaginations in memorable verbal images; they create pictures in our minds. Icons are considered to be “windows into heaven.” They are an opening from our world into the world to come. But of course one can look through a window in both directions: Icons open out from this world into the kingdom of God, and at the same time they let us see our world from the perspective of that one.

And that is exactly what the psalms do: They reveal to us our world, our own lives, from a God’s-eye point of view. When you ponder a psalm deeply, you find your ordinary perspective on the world challenged and gradually changed.

I want to focus on Psalm 65, which speaks to us powerfully about God and creation and our own place in the created order. As you read it, think of yourself as encountering an icon, a holy image given us so the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened, as the Apostle Paul says (Ephesians 1:18), so that we may see our world and ourselves as God might see us.

In this verbal icon, I see four things that

might surprise us, enlightening the eyes of our heart.

The first challenge. The first surprise to our ordinary way of thinking comes in the very first line: “To You [God], silence is praise.” That statement might well stop us in our tracks in our noise-saturated world. I did my own translation of Psalm 65 because other renderings often just walk around that statement, leaving out the silence altogether, so the first line reads: “You are to be praised ...” But the Hebrew is quite clear: “To You, *silence* is praise, O God in Zion.”

Honoring God begins when we stop talking or shouting or rushing around in our normal clamorous way—when we just *stop*. The person who taught me to ride a bicycle taught me first how to stop. “Then,” he said, “you won’t have to be afraid to ride, because you will know how to stop whenever you need to.” There is deep wisdom in that, and it is the same wisdom we encounter in this first line of the psalm, which is teaching us something about prayer. When we pray, we should first stop and listen. This psalm names God as “the One who hears prayer.” So we praise the God who truly listens by doing the same thing ourselves.

The second challenge. A second surprise is that the first thing to come out of the silence is an honest acknowledgment of sin, of being

illustration by M.P. Wiggins







overwhelmed by all we have done wrong and are still doing wrong: “Wrong acts—they are stronger than I am” (3). Probably all of us who think seriously about the ecological crisis feel exactly that: We are part of a society that has been whistling past the graveyard for a long time. We have a long history of wrongdoing, more than two centuries, and the problems we face—which we have largely created—are now a lot stronger than we are.

That is an honest statement, but the psalmist is not offering it as an excuse to give up. When we recognize that we are weak with respect to all that is wrong, then we are in the posture for prayer and repentance. Then we are ready to stop and offer praise for God’s power rather than our own, as we slowly begin to turn our lives around—no heroic gestures here, just a feeble bending away from what we have been doing wrong. Choosing God over our habitual misdeeds—that is daily, painstaking work. It proceeds by first one small choice and the follow-through, and then the next. Many of us know this in our personal lives, and now we must discover it in our common life, our social behavior. One decision at a time—that is how, by the grace of God, each of us, our families, our communities, our nation, and industrial society as a whole may gradually get out of the vise-like grip of our culturally induced misdeeds and walk a new path.

Last week I saw a friend whom I had not seen for a year or so, and she told me that her family had given up the car and is now using public transportation, or renting a car when they need it: “We don’t go to see our friends as often or as easily, but we want to simplify.” My friend and her husband are

successful professionals whose kids are now grown. Many at their stage of life would go ahead and buy the fancy car they had always wanted, do some luxury travel, and live it up a little, rather than making things harder on themselves. But they see it differently. Their desire is to simplify, to have less and do less. I think our psalmist would understand: “Let us be satisfied with the goodness of Your house,” she prays to God, “the holi-

God the Creator of everything is the same One who sustains the life of every single plant, every ecosystem, day by day.

ness of Your house” (4).

“Let us be satisfied”—that’s it in a nutshell, isn’t it? It’s all about satisfaction, or the lack of it. The perpetual desire for satisfaction is what drives our consumerism and ultimately puts our planet at risk, and at the same time impoverishes so many in this country and around the world. What the psalmist and my friends see is that we will never get out from underneath our powerful wrongs until we can be satisfied, not with getting more (as we have all been trained to want), but rather with the steady flow of goodness that comes from God.

The third challenge. What would it mean to feel that satisfaction deeply and live out of it? This brings us to the third point at which the psalmist both guides and challenges us, as

any good spiritual teacher does. The psalmist shows us what sincere praise looks like, praising God at both the macro level—God as Creator of heaven and earth—and also at the micro level: God who makes life possible every single day. Here God is praised as the One who “sets down the mountains in his strength” (6) and in the next breath as the One who “sets the grain” in the seed heads (9). “Setting” the mountains and “setting” the grain—it’s the same verb, and the point is that God, the Creator of everything, is the same One who sustains the life of every single plant, every ecosystem, day by day, with exquisite care. We might also imagine that the God who holds our souls in life grieves daily, as our recklessness reaches to place after place, jeopardizing and destroying life to a degree that is unprecedented in human history.

Many biblical passages portray God as the sustainer of life, but this psalm is wholly unique in giving us a detailed picture, an icon, of God the Farmer, who tends the soil, waters its furrows, blesses its growth with gentle rain, and crowns the year with a rich harvest. Now think about this for a moment. Almost all Israelites were farmers. So as they sang this song, they were honoring “God in Zion” as the One who shared their daily work of tending the fertile yet fragile farmland of the region, the thin-soiled, easily eroded hills around Jerusalem. Praising God the Good Farmer, they were taking on themselves the obligation to imitate the divine work of caring for the earth, perpetuating its fertility year after year.

Fewer and fewer of us are farmers today. So does this icon of God the Farmer mean anything at all to us? It should—it is one of the psalms commonly appointed for Thanksgiving Day and harvest time, when we give thanks for the fact that we can still eat day by day. This psalm reminds us that we cannot honor God at the macro level, as Creator, if we are not also honoring God at the micro level, in the ways that we live and work and eat from the good earth that God has made. The myriad small actions that make up daily life are our most essential acts of worship—which literally means “acknowledging God as worthy.” We all, individually and corporately, need to ask how we may praise God more fully and sincerely as we drive, or eat, or invest our retirement

funds, or shop for food and clothing, or heat and cool the house and the sanctuary.

The fourth challenge. Our psalm begins with silence, with stilling our noisy selves, and it ends with jubilant song. This is the fourth and final challenge and surprise I find in the psalm: God's praise does not come from human lips but rather from the fruitful earth itself. You might see this psalm as giving an update on the picture of creation that appears in the very first chapter of the Bible. You remember: In the first week of the world, God furnished the dry land with "plants seeding seed across the face of the earth" (Genesis 1:29), making enough food for every creature, and God viewed the whole setup and judged it to be *tov me'od*, very good indeed. Now Psalm 65 shows us what that divinely nurtured goodness looks like eons later in one place, in and around Jerusalem, the psalmist's home. This farmer-poet, as I imagine her or him, writes a verbal icon of God the maker of heaven and earth, driving home at the end of a long hot day in the fields, the wagon so loaded that the grain is falling over the sides

and God's wagon tracks "drip richness," as the psalmist says.

Now enter into this icon. Just sit here beside God in the wagon for a few moments and look around you. With your eyes closed but the eyes of your heart enlightened, experience the world as God does:

The meadows are clothed with the flocks,
and the valleys robed with grain.
They shout out; they even sing (13).

Can you see what God and the psalmist see? The grain-decked fields shouting and singing aloud, carrying on like worshippers (at least, like worshippers in traditions where they still know how to party in God's presence); the fertile fields are a source of praise for God. So we've come full circle, back to where the psalm began, to that silence that is praise for God. Humans fall silent while the fields perform their wordless "Hallelujah Chorus." Thus from first to last the psalmist is challenging us to hear what we cannot normally hear, deafened as we are by our own constant noise, whether it is piped into our ears or coming out of our mouths or racing through our unsettled minds and hearts. Calling for an end to

all that noise, this verbal icon reveals to us the great harmonious hymn of all the creatures, the silent praise they give to God.

This is a psalm for reordering our hearts and minds and lives, so that our ears may be opened to what we have not been able to hear. We must pray that our eyes may be enlightened, so that we can look at the world with the kind of steady absorption that, sadly, we often squander on mere screens, so that we might catch just a glimpse of what God sees, and hear a note or two of the song that gives pleasure to God. I wonder if we can do it. Let us pray that we can, that it might mark for us the beginning of our willing participation in the created order, the choir of all the creatures, whose harmony gives praise and glory to the Maker and Monarch and Savior of all. Amen. ■

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PSALM 65

(translation by Ellen F. Davis)

To You, silence is praise, O God in Zion,
and to You vows are paid. O You who hear prayer,
before You all flesh comes. Misdeeds—
they are stronger than I am; our transgressions—
You are the one who makes atonement.

Privileged are those whom You choose and draw near
to dwell in Your courts.
May we be satisfied with the goodness of Your house,
Your holy temple.
With awesome works, in righteousness, You answer us,
O God of our salvation,
the Confidence of all the ends of the earth,
and the furthest reaches of the sea.

He sets firm the mountains in his strength;
He is girded with might.
He silences the roar of the seas, the roar of their waves,
and the din of the nations.

Those who inhabit the ends of the earth
feel reverent-fear at your signs;
the reaches of morning and evening,
You make them ring with joy.

You visit the earth and water it;
You abundantly enrich it—
God's stream, full of water.
You set their grain—yes, You set it just so.
Drenching its furrows, settling its hillocks,
You soften it with showers; its growth You bless.
You have crowned the year with Your goodness,
and Your wagon-tracks drip richness.

The pastures of the wilderness are dripping,
and the hills are girdled with rejoicing.
The meadows are clothed with the flocks,
and the valleys robed with grain.
They shout out; they even sing.



WORK OF MANY HANDS

**When you pick up an apple in the store, think of those who held it first.
A day in the life of a farm worker • by IVONE GUILLEN**

“LORD, YOU ARE good to all and compassionate toward all you’ve made ... You are faithful in all your words, and gracious in all your deeds. The eyes of all look to you in hope, and you give them their food in due season” (Psalm 145:9, 13, 15).

I often reflect on this message from Psalm 145 and how each of us will interpret it differently according to the experiences we’ve had in life. This is true even for the things in life that connect and affect us all.

Take, for example, God’s gift of food. We are interconnected by this thing that was created to nourish our bodies and minds, allowing us to function in our daily lives and permitting us to live a full and healthy life. Yet how often do we think about where the food we eat comes from?

When I’m at the store, I often wonder whose hands cultivated and cared for the plants that produced the piles of neatly stacked fruit and vegetables. Was it a Lupe, a Daniel, or a Jesus? How long did they have to work under the blazing hot sun in order to get the produce to the store? What are their stories and where do they come from?

I think about these things because I grew up with people who worked long, hard hours to produce the best quality of fruit for the market. Since I was very young, my immediate family has been immersed in agricultural work. My mother was a farm worker who picked fruit and vegetables. Once we children were old enough, we joined my mom and the rest of the labor force, which was mainly comprised of immigrant farm laborers.

In the 19 years I’ve been around this work, rarely have I seen a non-immigrant hand in the orchards, and if I did, it surely wasn’t to help pick the fruit in bags that weigh up to 45 pounds.

Alongside other workers I learned what happens before fruit ends up at the grocery store. The process begins at the orchards, where the young trees are planted, nurtured, and cultivated by skilled immigrant laborers. The work is labor-intensive and exhausting and requires a certain degree of endurance. I remember that on most days, I just wanted to get home after a long day and sleep off the weariness. Although farm work is physically backbreaking, it nonetheless is a skilled profession.

“ISRAEL” IS A man who started out as a farm worker and with hard work, dedication, and the support of his employer was promoted to crew manager at a large apple orchard. He now oversees a group ranging from 30 to 90 people, depending on the season. Israel knows quite well the skill and knowledge required at each phase of the process to have a successful harvest. He described for me the pruning and thinning processes.

“Every year the tree has branches that overshadow too much and don’t allow the apple to develop, and you need to remove them,” said Israel. “You grab the scissors, get onto the ladder, and you begin pruning branch by branch until you finish the tree. You need to leave new wood; you need to take branches that will hinder





It takes a physically fit person to carry heavy bags up and down a 20-foot ladder for eight hours a day.



the tree so that the tree will grow to a good size and color.”

Then comes thinning season. “[Farm workers] have to stand in front of the tree and see if the apples are too bunched up,” Israel explained. “Start from the bottom of the branch, where there are bunches; they need to separate them to produce a large apple—if it’s bunched up it won’t be able to grow or get a good color. It’s giving space from apple to apple, taking away [extra fruit] from the middle.”

The last stage of the process is the harvest. It takes a physically fit person to be able to carry, repeatedly, heavy bags down an 8- to 20-foot ladder and to the field bins for eight hours a day. Individuals also have to be able

continue to learn daily.”

Each worker has a story to tell about their families and dreams and aspirations—and many wish that more people were willing to sit down and hear those stories. Immigrant workers are often scapegoated and discriminated against because of where they came from. Yet it is because of those immigrants doing the backbreaking work for low pay that we are able to purchase affordable produce.

Many immigrants have come here as a result of need, and their journeys have been emotionally scarring and perilous. These are people who have felt compelled to leave familiar environments, language, customs, and traditions to overcome a life of hunger and poverty. They then face an unfamiliar coun-

Although farm work is physically backbreaking, it nonetheless is a skilled profession.

to position a ladder quickly enough to keep up with their crew, which can include up to 90 people, depending on the size of the farm. The ladder has to be carefully placed, avoiding any damaged or weak branches that could cause slippage or breakage and cause the person to fall. You also don’t want to ruin any branches, or the tree will not be useful for the next harvest.

If the weather conditions are good, with no excessive snow, rain, or temperatures, a farm worker is able to pick anywhere from six to 12 bins a day—without bruising the apples. A full bin of apples weighs between 800 and 875 pounds, depending on the variety.

The goal is always to fill as many bins as possible—with quality fruit. Picking improperly can lead to bruised or unripe fruit that’s not good for sale. With apples, pickers must differentiate between the color in the different apple varieties to determine the maturity level, and they must also avoid physically defective fruit.

Full bins of apples are taken to a warehouse, where they go through another strenuous and extensive process to be packed and shipped to your neighborhood store.

FARM WORK IS an industry that requires constant adaptation to improve productivity and efficiency. Israel, who’s been a farm worker for 18 years, affirmed this: “Things constantly change, innovation occurs. We

try and an often unwelcoming environment. Most leave family behind—siblings, parents, spouses, and even children.

Some of the most heartbreaking stories I heard as I’ve talked with immigrant farm workers were from people who left elderly parents back in their home countries—parents who, because of travel restrictions, often pass away without seeing their children again. The disillusionment and sense of failure in people’s faces as they tell these stories is heart-wrenching. One man told me he hasn’t seen his aging mother in 13 years. She often urges him to visit, saying, “Son, come and see me; you’re going to come and see me when I’m in my coffin.”

This kind of deep human pain gets lost in the relentlessly negative rhetoric often used to define immigrants. Such rhetoric is rarely based on first-person encounters, but rather is fed by fear, prejudice, and distorted media messages.

So the next time you are at the grocery store picking up a fruit or vegetable, be mindful that it was most likely touched by an immigrant farm worker’s hands, the hands of a person who is also part of God’s creation, created in the image of God. And remember that “the Lord is good to all; God has compassion on all God has made.” ■

Ivone Guillen is the immigration fellow at Sojourners.

NOURISHING WORDS

Books on food and farming.

Exodus from Hunger: We Are Called to Change the Politics of Hunger, by David Beckmann. Westminster John Knox Press.

Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating, by Norman Wirzba. Cambridge University Press.

Food Rebels, Guerrilla Gardeners, and Smart-Cookin’ Mamas: Fighting Back in an Age of Industrial Agriculture, by Mark Winne. Beacon Press.

Food Rules: An Eater’s Manual, by Michael Pollan. Penguin.

Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible, by Ellen F. Davis. Cambridge University Press.

Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion, by Sara Miles. Ballantine.

The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee’s, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table, by Tracie McMillan. Scribner.

The Seasons on Henry’s Farm: A Year of Food and Life on a Sustainable Farm, by Terra Brockman. Agate Surrey.

Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and Christian Diet, by David Grumett and Rachel Muers. Routledge.

Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit, by Barry Estabrook. Andrews McMeel Publishing.

Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism, by Julie Guthman. University Press Books. —Compiled by Julie Polter

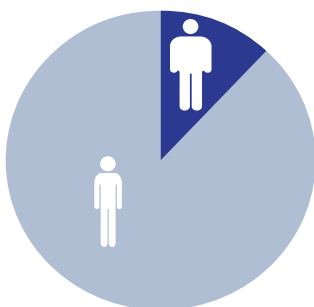


FAT OF THE LAND

While 925 million people worldwide go hungry, Americans are dying of obesity-related diseases. We are ingesting record amounts of high-calorie, low-nutrient corn-based products in everything from soda to chicken fingers. Serving as waste disposals for high-fructose corn syrup isn't exactly in line with the scriptural call, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Design by Ken Davis

1960-1980



U.S. obesity levels are around 15%.

1978



Fructose consumption per capita is 8% of total caloric intake.

1980-1985

Excess corn production seeks market. High-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) enters U.S. diet. By 1984, Coke and Pepsi switch to HFCS. By 2000, 42% of sweetener consumed by Americans will be from high-fructose corn syrup.

1974-1977

Price of sugar imported to U.S. spikes (in part due to increased minimum wage for sugar workers).



One ear or two?



1968



McDonald's has 1,000 restaurants. Within two years, Americans will spend \$6 billion annually on fast food.

1973

Nixon administration deregulates corn market, leading to overproduction and family-farm crisis.



1995

Direct medical costs of obesity are at \$51.64 billion.

>\$51B



1970

Average American consumes 2,057 calories per day.

2,057

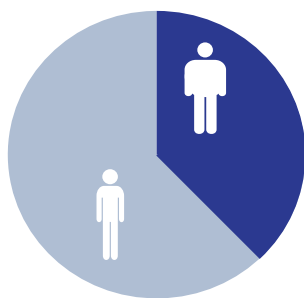
Sources: World Hunger Education Service; *Fast Food Nation*; Univ. of Florida; Centers for Disease Control; Trust for America's Health; *The Omnivore's Dilemma*; American Diabetes Association; USDA; Princeton University; WFPL News.

2003



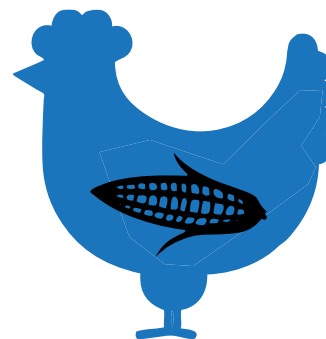
Obesity-related medical costs reach \$75 billion.

2004



Adult obesity levels in the U.S. reach 32.2%.

2008



Study suggests that the vast majority of fast-food beef and chicken comes from corn-fed animals. Obesity levels in U.S. climb to 33.8% in adults and 17% in children, across all income and education levels. Fructose consumption among adolescents increases to 12%. Average American consumes 2,674 calories per day, a 30% increase from 1970.

2007



\$116B

\$116 billion is spent on direct medical costs for diagnosed diabetes in the U.S.

2002



Americans on average weigh 24 pounds more than in the 1960s.

2010-2011

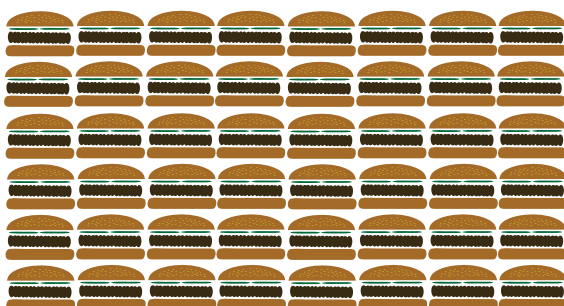
Americans consume 60 pounds of HFCS each year and 35.7% of U.S. adults are obese. In 2011, Yum Brands lobbies state legislatures to permit the use of food stamps at fast-food restaurants by the disabled, elderly, and homeless.

Let them eat tacos!

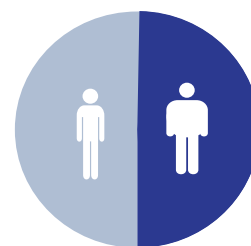


1998

By 1998, McDonald's has more than 23,000 restaurants worldwide. Americans spend more than \$100 billion on fast food.



2030



If current rates continue, 49% of Americans will be obese by 2030.



DRIVING TOWARD CUBA'S FUTURE

A U.S. church delegation this winter discovered a Cuba at the crossroads of change.

THE CARS IN Cuba fascinate me. Where else in the world can one see a classic 1956 Oldsmobile, a shiny 1957 Chevy, and a 1970 VW bug alongside a new Audi and modern Chinese tour buses?

Our guide said there are four generations of cars in Cuba. First are those pre-revolutionary American cars—the vintage Chevys, Fords, Oldsmobiles, and Studebakers from the 1950s that somehow keep running. Then came the Russian-made Ladas, the small, ugly, square compacts that look like Fiats stripped of any Italian design.

By the '70s and '80s, Japanese and other Asian cars started trickling into Cuba, and they became the auto of choice after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Then, in the last decade, the more expensive European cars began showing up. More recently, a fleet of fancy buses, mostly from China, has arrived to shuttle around the 2.5 million tourists now visiting the island each year (and improve public transportation in general).

The cars, of course, reflect the stages of Cuba's economic relationship with the outside world: the embargo from the U.S., its initial reliance on all things Russian, then growing global trade, followed by the influx of European tourists, and the recent economic resurgence of China.

Cars can now be bought and sold by Cubans. This is one example of dramatic new economic policies, approved last April, being instituted in Cuba. Dr. Osvaldo Martinez, director of Cuba's

Getty Images

Because of the 52-year-old U.S. embargo of Cuba, driving on Havana's streets is like entering a time warp.

When the U.S. embargo with Cuba is finally lifted, a surge of fresh energy and creativity will flow across the waters between Miami and Havana.

World Economy Research Center, called these changes “shock therapy,” like that being experienced by Greece, Spain, and many countries. Cubans should no longer “idolize” the Cuban economic model, Martinez said. Salaries have been increasing faster than productivity. Foods are being imported that could be produced domestically, but weren’t because of the inefficiencies of centralized, Soviet-style agriculture. There has been an “exaggerated number of state employees,” and massive layoffs have been occurring. At times Martinez nearly sounded like a Republican.

So the Cuban government has been legalizing and enlarging “self-employment.” People can employ themselves as carpenters, plumbers, masons, shoe repairers, taxi drivers, and food vendors—in all there are now about 300,000 self-employed people in 200 areas, and the numbers are growing all the time.

WALKING DOWN QUIET side streets of Havana, one sees small shops in the front courtyards of row houses selling pizza, snacks, ice cream, and lunch sandwiches. More restaurants are opening. Away from the cities, parcels of unused agricultural land are now being given, rent-free, to small producers, reminiscent of the American practices that opened the West to farming.

Next year a tax policy—unknown previously to most Cubans—will go into place. All these are major changes now being adopted, implemented, and accelerated in Cuba’s socialist economic system.

At the same time, officials insist that Cuba’s socialist model is not being abandoned; it is being reformed. The gains made in human development—the elimination of illiteracy, accessible and free education for all, free medical care that touches every citizen, a system of social security—will always be safeguarded, they say. Life expectancy in Cuba is 78.8 years, one of the highest of developing countries and similar to the U.S. What we would call the “social safety net” is sacrosanct, protecting all Cubans, even in the midst of the dislocation experienced by some from these economic reforms.

Cuban religious life is finding new vitality. While I visited, pilgrimages honoring the Virgin of Charity—based on the story of the appearance of the Virgin to two Indigenous Cubans and a slave boy in 1612 in El Cobre—were underway, involving 2 million people.

The Methodists in Cuba have the goal of establishing a “preaching station” in every community in the country, and they report being 85 percent toward completing this outreach. Their worship has become more Pentecostal in style. Pastoral leadership is raised up locally, often without much training. It sounded like the story of Methodism on the American frontier in the 19th century.

Even the Orthodox Church is growing in Cuba. A previous Greek Orthodox Church in Havana withered away after the revolution, and its building became a children’s theater. But in 2004, the government responded to a request supported by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul to build a new church in Havana. At the time, there were four baptized Orthodox in Cuba, and one priest.

Our delegation of U.S. church leaders visited the small but beautiful new cathedral in downtown Havana, and the Greek Orthodox Archbishop for Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Cuba was with us. Today, he told us, there are 1,500 Orthodox families in this church, and Orthodox missions have been started in five other cities in Cuba. Young people come, searching for a deep spirituality. The archbishop, who grew up in Chicago, said that Cuba is “absolutely open to religious freedom.”

Regardless of one’s assessment, there is no doubting that religious life is alive and flourishing. Pentecostal and evangelical churches are growing, often in all-too-familiar tension with more-mainline Protestants on the island, whose numbers have expanded in the last two decades. Cuba’s historic Catholic community was anticipating Pope Benedict’s late March visit. This visit was scheduled to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the appearance of the Virgin of Charity. Politically, it signifies the Vatican’s support for the steps toward political and economic reform being carried out by the Cuban government.

Part of the negotiations over the pope’s visit involved a release of nearly all those recognized as political prisoners. Amnesty International stated that the release of these prisoners would result in only one “prisoner of conscience” remaining. Others cited more, but at the end of 2011, Raul Castro announced an overall amnesty of 2,900 prisoners—including some classified as political prisoners—as a humanitarian gesture, and probably linked to the papal visit.

Cuba continues with a one-party political system without the opportunities of political organizing and civic engagement taken for granted in Western democracies. But even U.S. diplomats in Havana admit that the freedom to express political views is growing.

The fundamental gains in health, welfare, and education from the Cuban revolution are deeply embraced by society. The hope is that the economic reforms will now open new options and that political changes will follow. But don't expect a Tahrir Square in Havana; these changes will be evolutionary, not revolutionary.

The U.S. embargo on commercial, financial, and trading relationships between the U.S. and Cuba has been in place in various ways for 52 years, making it the longest-lasting trade embargo in U.S. history. When our delegation met with John Caulfield, head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, I reminded him that "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result."

For more than five decades, the U.S. policy of trying to economically and diplomatically isolate Cuba has not achieved its goal of changing the regime to our liking. Instead, it has economically and diplomatically isolated the U.S. In the most recent vote of the U.N. General Assembly calling for the lifting of the embargo—one of 20 over the years—186 nations voted in favor and two (the United States and Israel) voted against. And the buses, cars, computers, and so much else that Cuba is buying are coming from China, Japan, Korea, and Europe, instead of creating jobs in Michigan, Ohio, and Florida.

CUBAN SENSITIVITY TO the U.S. desire to dictate its future has deep historical roots. Benjamin Franklin talked about annexing Cuba in 1767. Likewise, Thomas Jefferson wanted Cuba as part of the U.S. to protect commercial shipping routes. A long and troubled history resulted, felt today when Cubans, both in government offices and in church sanctuaries, explain that they genuinely want friendship with the United States, but they also desire respect. For the past 50 years, the U.S. has been unable to provide either.



In February, people pass a banner welcoming Pope Benedict that hangs from a wall of Havana's cathedral.

Getty Images

still keep running. But they won't last forever. The exiled leaders of the Cuban resistance are like those old cars. They are honored and revered by many, but people know that it's the newer Toyotas and Hyundais that will shape the future of the Cuban-American community. A younger generation doesn't carry the emotional enmity of their elders.

And the same can be said for the generations on the island. Young people in Cuba don't want octogenarians ruling their country. One of President Raul Castro's several reforms was his proposal to the Communist Party Congress last April that all politicians be limited to two five-year terms. In the long run, the generation of the revered but aging cars from the 1950s, and the ugly Russian Ladas that followed, won't be driving Cuba's future.

When the U.S. embargo with Cuba is finally lifted, a surge of fresh energy, creativity, and shared resources will flow across the waters between Miami and Havana. The shared cultural and social experiences in music, art, food, and sports will flourish, fostering common bonds that are both beneath and beyond politics. But this will also create a moment of truth for Cuba's economic development. Ending the "blockade" will remove the temptation to blame all of the island's economic woes on the hostility of its northern neighbor. Cuba's capacity for a vibrant economic life, undergirded by its foundational values of social solidarity, will be put to an honest test.

Certainly, there are old and painful enmities between the Cubans who created their revolution and the Cubans who left, dispossessed, desperate, and destroyed. But history in our own time and memory has witnessed those kinds of wounds being healed. So if the church on both sides of the 90 miles separating our countries can play a role healing this broken relationship, we would be witnessing simply and powerfully to the ministry of reconciliation we know in Jesus Christ. ■

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, author of *Unexpected Destinations* and former general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, visited Cuba this winter with a delegation from the National Council of Churches.

President Obama did initiate some fresh departures from the frozen past. Allowing Cuban Americans to visit their relatives in Cuba, beginning a year ago, was probably the most important. As many as 400,000 are estimated to come this year. But still no U.S. citizen is allowed to visit Cuba as a tourist. Further changes don't have a prayer until Florida casts its electoral votes this November.

When the U.S. was in the midst of the Cold War and Cuba was deeply dependent on the Soviet Union, one could understand the hostile relationship between our two countries. But the world has dramatically changed. Consider the U.S. relationship with Vietnam. As many as 2 million Vietnamese died from the destruction we rained down, and America's dead and wounded left deep scars in our national psyche. Yet today U.S. business, trade, and tourism with Vietnam thrive. Veterans return to heal their wounds. A U.S. embassy, once abandoned by a famous final helicopter flight from its roof, now conducts normal relations. And the Vietnamese political system continues with its one-party rule, in the midst of economic reforms. Only a failure of will, imagination, and political courage prevents this from happening with Cuba.

Cuba and Cuban Americans are experiencing a generational shift. So I return to the cars.

Those remarkable cars from the 1950s

DOING IT THE HARD WAY

Gamaliel's Ana Garcia-Ashley is the first woman of color to lead a national community organizing network, faith-based or otherwise. And she's pulling no punches.

"QUESTION PEOPLE WHO have authority, because they tend not to use it well unless you stay on top of them."

That's what Ana Garcia-Ashley learned from her grandmother, a seamstress and a teacher in the *campo* of the Dominican Republic. She was a woman who taught by example, challenging anybody in her small village who misused power. "She would not tolerate anything," remembers Ana. "She took on whomever—even priests."

And you can say the same about Ana.

Throughout more than 30 years of community organizing, Ana has put her Catholic faith into action by holding people in power accountable: standing in protest at state capitols, stopping predatory lenders, and blocking deportation trucks by laying her body in the road. "To me there is only one way to be a Catholic," she says,

"and that is out in the public arena, doing something."

In 2011, Ana became the executive director of Gamaliel, a national network for faith-based community organizing. As "congregational" or faith-based organizers, Gamaliel emphasizes

systemic change: engaging congregations in the work of feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and sheltering the homeless, but also in the work of transforming the oppressive systems that leave so many people without food, health insurance, or homes in the first place.

Ana also is the first woman of color to lead a national community organizing network, faith-based or otherwise.

"I am emboldened and encouraged that leadership in the field has become more representative of our grassroots leaders and organizers," wrote Ana during her first year as executive director.

And "representative" is a good word to describe an organization that works across lines of race, gender, class, denomination, and religion. Gamaliel's network includes more than 60 congregation-based organizations from 19 U.S. states, Great Britain, and South Africa, including rural, urban, and suburban communities. Their work is multi-issue, non-partisan, and "above all, an expression of the personal faith and values of its members."

Ana wouldn't have it any other way. "We can't leave the decision-making to a few, mostly-white males in D.C.," she says. "That would be too easy. I believe that out of all the people who claim to be working for the common

Photos by Rick Reinhard



Ana Garcia-Ashley inside—and outside—at a recent Gamaliel gathering in Washington, D.C.





good, people of faith have the most legitimate and compelling reason because this is what we're all about. We're about transforming ourselves to be better agents for our belief in the world—the real world.”

THE WORK OF COMMUNITY organizing begins with the realization that the real world has real brokenness. For Ana, this awareness came especially early. At age 6, she and her family were forced to flee the Dominican Republic in fear of the violence and political instability caused by the U.S. intervention (read: occupation) following the assassination of dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961. Ana describes the experience: “The

lives become a nightmare.”

But today Ana doesn't feel helpless—far from it. As she has taught so many other leaders, she knows individuals have tremendous power to create a more just society. So last July Ana joined thousands of peaceful demonstrators outside the White House to protest the deportation of 1 million undocumented immigrants under the Obama administration. Along with about 10 other leaders calling for immigration reform, Ana was arrested for sitting down on the sidewalk and refusing to budge.

For Ana, it was a powerful, spiritual decision. “I am ready to be arrested today at the gates of the White House because my

Building power organizations for people to live out their values and to create a better community ‘is of God.’

ride to the airport, the vaccinations, the needle going into my arm. I remember every single frame of that experience from the time we went to the American Consulate to the time we landed at Kennedy airport.”

Some estimate more than 50,000 Dominicans fled to the United States during the 1960s, and most of them, like Ana's family, resettled in New York City. For Ana, it was a helpless feeling she vowed never to repeat: “The Dominican Republic was made unsafe by Marines and the American war machine,” she states, “so I was forced to leave everything I cared about, everything that was important to me, and move to the South Bronx. It was just hard to comprehend.”

Thinking about that trip from the Dominican Republic to the Bronx still makes Ana angry: “What happened to me as a child is happening every day to children all over the world because their parents are trying to get a better life,” explains Ana. “Then they land here and they're called ‘illegals.’ Their

faith demands it,” wrote Ana in a statement released before the arrest. “I believe in a God who is always on the side of justice, never of cruelty. I see how our broken immigration system is destroying countless lives and families. My faith will not let me stay silent.”

Several months after that hot day in July, Ana sat with me in a tiny room of a former convent in Milwaukee—the home of Gamaliel's Wisconsin affiliate—and explained that the important part of that day last summer “wasn't the arrest,” but “sitting on the hard marble on a hot day, feeling every part of my being sweating and feeling that this is what my faith calls me to do: to go and stand at the White House and say ‘I am not moving from here because I want you to hear me: Deporting a million people without due process is not justice. It's not democracy either.’”

But she's not just talking about immigration. Creating a more just society runs deeper than any single issue or community:

“We're talking about a lifestyle, a culture, a global community, and it impacts everything,” she says. “We're all connected.” And everyone has something to contribute: “Whether you're an organizer or a parishioner or a secretary or a fellow or a writer, you are being called to stand in the public arena and say ‘This is not right.’”

GAMALIEL BORROWS ITS name from the story of Paul's teacher, the wise rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 5, 22). After advising the rest of the Sanhedrin not to kill the apostles, Gamaliel concludes with this warning: “but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God” (Acts 5:39)!

For Ana and the people of Gamaliel, it's a theme that's dominated their work for more than 25 years: “We feel, very strongly, that building power organizations for people to live out their values and to create a better community—and state, and country, and world—‘is of God.’” But she clarifies: “That doesn't mean we win all the time. That doesn't mean we're well-financed. But it does mean we know in our heart it's the right thing. And that speaks volumes.”

In 1968, Gamaliel was begun to support the Contract Buyers League in its fight against predatory real estate and insurance brokering practices on the south and west sides of Chicago. Led by Jesuit organizer Jack Macnamara and community leader Ruth Wells, the league eventually succeeded in renegotiating contracts to save victims of racist contracts \$6 million. According to the *Chicago Sun Times*, it was “very close to an economic miracle.”

Ana's witnessed some miracles of her own, including securing an unprecedented \$500 million from Milwaukee banks toward mortgages for the city's low-income residents. But behind every success story is the slow work of developing relationships and raising up new leaders. “Yes, organizing is about putting a million people on the Mall in D.C.,” says Ana, “but the real skill of organizing is finding the best in an individual and seeing them live it out, becoming fully human, in all senses.”

And that takes practice. After the success of the Contract Buyers League, Gamaliel was restructured in 1986 as a training institute to teach community leaders how to “bring

about shared abundance, sacred community, unrelenting hope, equal opportunity, and justice within our communities and throughout the world.” With more than 100 training events every year, equipping leaders to do the work of faith-based community organizing has remained foundational to Gamaliel’s mission ever since.

Ana explains that these trainings are “designed for people who really want to take risks in their lives and dismantle all the fears and masks they have accumulated to hide out from being significant.” The methods are both “Socratic” and “agitational.” Trainees must articulate who they are, what they want to do, and why they want to do it. And be warned: All responses are challenged. “Yes, we are agitators,” admits Ana. “We need more courage to speak truth to power.” And though Ana is glad grassroots movements like the Occupiers have energized direct-action movements, she believes the future of community organizing lies in long-term strategies to hold national political leaders accountable.

But for groups like Gamaliel that have long succeeded by focusing on local campaigns, this demands a strategic shift. “Decisions that directly and profoundly affect the lives of ordinary people are often made in corridors of power that are drastically removed from their localities,” states Gamaliel’s strategy for faith-based civic engagement in the 21st century. “Gamaliel will continue to train grassroots leaders ... but we have increasingly come to recognize the importance of an expanded role of coordinating members across national campaigns.”

For Ana, this makes everything more complicated. “We used to say, ‘I’m an organizer and I have 15 churches on the north side of Milwaukee. All I have to do is build core teams there and stop foreclosures for the people in my church.’ Now, organizers have to figure out how to take on Wells Fargo.” Consequently, Ana foresees that partnerships with like-minded organizations will become absolutely critical: “We can’t afford to be out of relationship with others seeking the same changes,” she says.

It’s a long road, but Ana is optimistic. “With congregational-based organizing, we have that longevity,” she says, “This is justice work for the long haul.” ■

Betsy Shirley (@BetsyShirley), former editorial assistant at Sojourners, is a freelance writer in Wisconsin.

in the pews and we need to shake them up. We need to worship and to pray, but also put that into action.”

WHEN THE OCCUPY tents hit Wall Street last autumn, Ana was excited. “People publicly declaring their discontent is very inspiring to me,” says Ana. “We need more courage to speak truth to power.” And though Ana is glad grassroots movements like the Occupiers have energized direct-action movements, she believes the future of community organizing lies in long-term strategies to hold national political leaders accountable.

“We are all responsible for what’s happening or not happening at a national level,” she says. “Organizing really needs to take responsibility for the messes going on in Washington. We can no longer say this is not our mess.”

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Betsy Shirley (@BetsyShirley), former editorial assistant at Sojourners, is a freelance writer in Wisconsin.

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The Five Stages of Grief

Denial

This has nothing to do with blackness.
This has everything to do with blackness.

Anger

I could break things
but everything is broken.

Bargaining

Maybe I should have left
with the slave catchers.

Depression

I will die in this same skin
that I'm living in.

Acceptance

Cotton never left the plantation
only my mind did.

E. Ethelbert Miller is editor of Poet Lore magazine, director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University, and author of, most recently, The Fifth Inning.



"A Bouquet of Whippings—
Cotton Fields Forever."
Sculpture by Toni Scott,
2010

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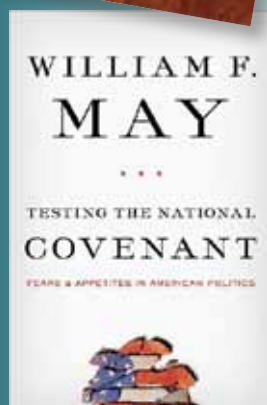
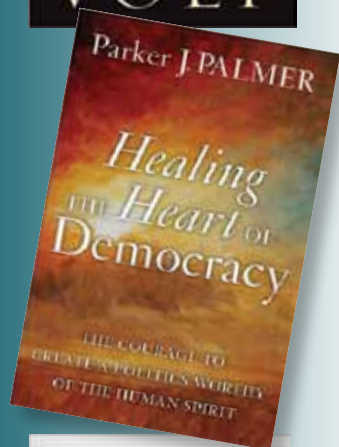
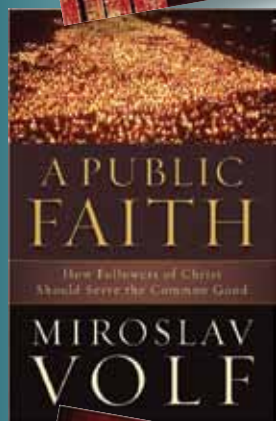
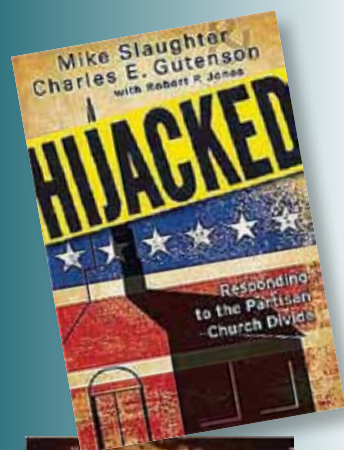
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Bearing Witness in Contentious Times

Four books that encourage people of faith to bring more light
and less heat to the public square—and to our pews.

by DEBRA DEAN MURPHY

ELECTION-YEAR POLITICS reveal the struggle faced by people of all political persuasions: how to meaningfully engage a process that increasingly sows division, disappointment, disgust, and even despair. Americans, no surprise, are more cynical than ever. Our elected officials are spectacularly unpopular. While there has never been a golden age of American politics, the current levels of vitriol, fear-mongering, and childish bickering have unsettled even the most jaded of political observers. And the corruption wrought by money? Let's not even go there.

Navigating the intersection of religion and politics in such a toxic environment poses an even more acute challenge. What's a person of faith to do? That, of course, depends on whom you ask, since the political battle lines in religious communities are often drawn as rigidly as they are in the culture at large.

Four recent books, each dealing broadly with religion and politics in contemporary America, offer insights on these and other pressing questions.

In **Testing the National Covenant: Fears and Appetites in American Politics** (Georgetown University Press), ethicist William F. May takes the historical approach, examining two competing accounts of

America's origins—the *contractual* and the *covenantal*—and the prospects and promises held out by each. He notes that the preamble to the Constitution begins with a given identity—"We the People"—followed almost immediately by the acknowledgment of ongoing work (to form "a more perfect union"). May argues that this "American identity of gift and task" is best held together by the concept of covenant. The nation, he says, "is both a community and a community in the making." May is a keen observer and an eloquent chronicler of the "runaway fears and appetites" that have driven a good deal of self-deception in American public life, and he reckons honestly with the harm done to our national character and, more urgently, to decision-making in policies both foreign and domestic. His final chapter, a moving discussion of immigrants and undocumented workers, brings the theme of "keeping covenant" to bear on one of the most pressing moral and political issues of our time.

Mike Slaughter and Charles E. Gutenson's **Hijacked: Responding to the Partisan Church Divide** (Abingdon Press) has the feel of a "handbook"—a practical guide for navigating a sensitive subject in small-group settings. Drawing on their years of experience in church leadership (Slaughter is the longtime pastor of Ginghamburg United

Methodist Church in Tipp City, Ohio), seminary teaching and advocacy (Gutenson has taught at Asbury and worked at Sojourners), the authors examine the partisan divide and increasing ideological homogeneity among white evangelical Protestants. With input from religion pollster Robert P. Jones, Slaughter and Gutenson note the escalating rancor, the obscuring of the gospel's own political edge, and the loss of disaffected church members (Slaughter's exasperation comes through when he pleads: "Will someone please tell me how we are not proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel?"). Moving from description to prescription, *Hijacked* seeks to chart a way forward, offering practical tips (e.g., "select news sources with care" and "teach, teach, teach") for "escaping the ideological bubble." It is possible, though, that the very way the authors have framed and narrated the debate—for example, tracing the root of the problem (accurately) to the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan—will keep the "hijackers" from joining the negotiations.

In **A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good** (Brazos Press), prominent Yale theologian Miroslav Volf writes about a longtime interest of his, one informed by his work as director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture: how people with deeply held religious convictions might be agents of reconciliation and signs of hope in an increasingly fractured world. Resisting the false choices of exclusion or saturation in such a quest (withdrawal from culture, on the one hand, or a dangerous mingling of church and state on the other), followers of Christ, Volf says, must recognize that they have "no place from which to transform the *whole culture they inhabit*—no place from which to undertake that eminently modern project of restructuring the whole of social and intellectual life." Instead, Christians undertake the task of bearing witness in the world to the wisdom of Christ—to an "integrated *way of life* that enables the flourishing of persons, communities, and all creation." *A Public Faith* returns to a familiar theme in Volf's work: a refusal of the popular view that all religions share a common core. It may seem counterintuitive, but conflicts between, say, Muslims and Christians cannot be resolved by appealing to an underlying

More Books on Faith and Politics



The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good, by Marcia Pally (Eerdmans)

Left, Right & Christ: Evangelical Faith in Politics, by Lisa Sharon Harper and D.C. Innes (Russell Media)

Faith and Race in American Political Life, edited by Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth (University of Virginia Press)

And from the last presidential election cycle, but still pertinent: **Beyond Left and Right: Helping Christians Make Sense of American Politics**, by Amy E. Black (Baker Books)

sameness; rather, insists Volf, hope is found in attending to the "internal resources of each for fostering a culture of peace."

Parker Palmer's latest offering trades in these same aspirations of bridge-building and human flourishing, though it is the least theological of the books under review here. Palmer is the founder and senior partner of the Center for Courage and Renewal, and his body of work resists easy classification. For decades he has written about and advocated for a transformation of the educational process—its theories and practices and pedagogies. In **Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit** (Jossey-Bass), Palmer strikes familiar notes with his insistence on "looking at politics through the eyes of the heart." Palmer's passion for the restoration of a true democratic process in American political life is evident throughout: He sees through the tears in his own eyes and through his own "broken-open heart." Only in this way, he insists, is it possible to see and understand clearly "the gap [that exists] between America's aspiration and its reality." To make his case, Palmer draws on the eloquent prose of Abraham Lincoln and the poetic imagination of Rainer Maria Rilke throughout the book. In appealing to "the better angels of our nature," he argues that

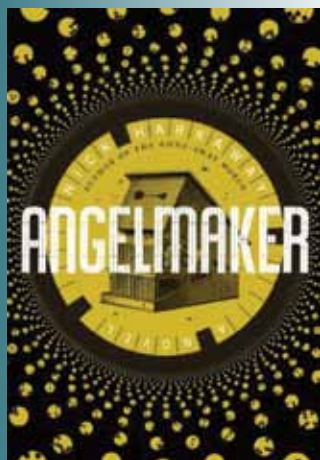
"[f]ull engagement in the movement called democracy requires no less of us than full engagement in the living of our own lives."

Yet it is this reflexive embrace of (and uncritical stance toward) "democracy" or—as with the other authors here—"the political realm" or "the public space" that deserves deeper scrutiny. When May matter-of-factly observes, for instance, that "the church and other volunteer communities contribute to public culture," it is easy to forget that there is, in fact, no singular, universal "public." That is, as John Howard Yoder once observed, "there is no non-provincial general community;" there are only competing narrative visions and varied sets of social values, institutions, laws, and symbols that determine and direct our ways of living, doing, and being. For Christians, what is "given" (inevitable, assumed) is *not* "the secular" or the political arrangements of modern, democratic social orders but the body politic of the church across time and space. And as a body politic, the church engages other orders, spheres, powers, etc. in an ad hoc way: sometimes resisting, sometimes cooperating, and, when at its best, negotiating the complexity of these challenges with generosity, not hostility, practicing the way of radical, embodied, cruciform witness.

These authors, for all the impressive insight they bring to their respective undertakings, do not go far enough in naming "America" or "democracy" or "the public realm" as the imaginative projects they are, and thus the church-as-an-alternative-*polis* (and not merely a "contributor" to something more determinative than the Body of Christ) is unavailable for their descriptions and prescriptions. For each of these Christian apologists, the means they advocate are, finally, insufficiently radical for the audacious ends they rightly desire.

And thus the challenge endures: As partisan politics gets uglier, as economic injustice increases, as suspicion and distrust continue to win the day, how might Christian communities do better at both conceptualizing and giving material witness to another way of living, doing, and being in the world? ■

Debra Dean Murphy is assistant professor of religion at West Virginia Wesleyan College. She blogs at debraDeanmurphy.wordpress.com and ekklesiaProject.org.



"With history as the frame of the self, how do we avoid the mistakes of the past?"

—Nick Harkaway

Fun, Fantasy, and Other Deep Truths

Nick Harkaway, writer of novels that brim with humor and meaning, talks about legacy, not-so-silly writing, and the moral to our stories.

by RICHARD VERNON

NICK HARKAWAY'S second novel, *Angelmaker*, is out now through Knopf. His first, *The Gone-Away World*, found favor with fans of boisterously literate science fiction. *Angelmaker* is, in many ways, tipped from the same mold as its predecessor. It is unapologetically fun (with a particularly English sense of humor familiar to fans of Stephen Fry and Douglas Adams), stuffed full of blisteringly creative ideas and digressive subplots, and shot through with darker undernotes. In it Harkaway asks some large questions about (among other things) the nature of identity, who owns the truth, the dark side of the will to power, and the true cost of the preservation of stability. The novel also makes a strong case for the power of compassion, courage, and the glory of imagination used well.

Angelmaker follows two alternating threads. In one an irreverent and intelligent orphaned girl, Edie Banister, is recruited into wartime secret service with the Ruskinites, an order of men and women devoted to beautiful craftsmanship who have been roped into weapons development. She rescues and falls in love with a genius who is using microscopic clockwork to build a supercomputer that will reveal the truth and end war. This "Apprehension Engine" (the titular Angelmaker), is baroque and bizarre; the force field of truth is to be disseminated

by mechanical bees swarming from clockwork hives around the world. Naturally, an unreconstructed dictator wants to use it as a weapon of mass destruction.

The second thread is the present-day tale of Joe Spork, as he attempts to lead a humble, honest life until he is manipulated into adventure by the elderly Banister and pursued by the now-corrupt and terrifying Ruskinites.

In both Spork and Banister, Harkaway has created compelling protagonists. Banister is a fabulous character, a strong, smart woman (one of several in the novel) who, for instance, will not allow herself to excuse murders in self-defense that were almost entirely necessary.

Even so, Banister plays second fiddle to Joe Spork, a man who is dodging the legacy of his father, an infamous criminal, while emulating his late grandfather, Daniel, even reviving his forebear's business as a repairer of clockwork devices. The trauma and growth Joe goes through as he loses his best friend, finds love, and discovers the deeper truth about the weighty inheritance from both father and grandfather is what drives the novel, and makes it so very satisfying.

Harkaway, as novelist John Le Carré's son, has some weighty inheritance of his own. Le Carré is best known for his George



Author Nick Harkaway

Tom Coates Smiley spy novels, which are back in the limelight because of the recent hit movie based on one, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. Ahead of *Angelmaker's* publication, I chatted with Nick Harkaway, via (this being 2012) tweets, emails, and a trans-Atlantic conversation between Brooklyn and London, constrained at each end by our respective young daughters. Harkaway is as warmly intelligent in conversation as his fiction had me hope. I teasingly accused him of being nothing more than Le Carré Jr.—all spies and global concerns, but with more explosions and less nuance (this last an outright lie I threw in for comic effect).

“Well, yes,” he replied. “That is biologically true, and I think personally inevitable and enormously reassuring. We carry our parents within us and are carried in turn by our kids. And inevitably that is also our greatest trial: With history as the frame of the self, how do we avoid the mistakes of the past? And I think the answer can only be: with intelligence and compassion. Which is fine. What else is it all for?”

As a novelist raised by a novelist, he has some clear ideas of why he writes.

“The novel is a statement of identity, and it’s narrative, and hopefully it’s fun, but it can be a tool. As the novelist, I created a situation in a postposterous landscape, with

clockwork bees and the rest of it, but hopefully something resonates in the real world. If it provokes even a moment’s introspection or consideration, it’s been effective. My hope is that if someone compares their reality to the one they just experienced in the novel, it can be educative. Problems come about when people run the program of their profession without stopping to examine it. Art helps us to check the program, to examine

The force field of truth is to be disseminated by mechanical bees swarming from clockwork hives around the world.

what we are. I want [my fiction] to be fun too. It *is* fun. Hopefully. Unfortunately ‘Fun Writing’ is de facto ‘Silly Writing,’ and dismissed. Whereas I feel fun can be revealing, caustic, and critical.”

Harkaway’s fiction is fun, but he’s not shy of folding a message into the mix and framing questions—in writing and in conversation—in boldly moral terms.

“The left-right divide is decreasingly useful. We’re framing 21st century problems within a 19th century discussion. The issues are multi-polar, and we’re intent on

pursuing them in a binary way, in a two- or three-party system.”

This is so similar to a line familiar to *Sojourners* readers a few years ago, “move beyond the tired old categories of left and right,” that I cite it. When I get to “find common ground by moving to higher ground,” Harkaway chuckles and says, “I’d settle for taking care of the ground we have.”

“We need to broaden our concepts of

what’s possible, to think in terms of 100-year, rather than four-year, cycles. We have to do the job that’s in front of us; we have to actually do the right thing—even when it’s painful.

“The legacy of George W. Bush—which spread to Tony Blair and others and has set the tone for global and domestic politics—is to *not* face the hard ethical choice, but to take the easy way out and *say* it was hard. That’s how we end up with Guantánamo and its ilk, rather than the rule of law. That excuse, ‘If the world was a better place, then ...’ is a

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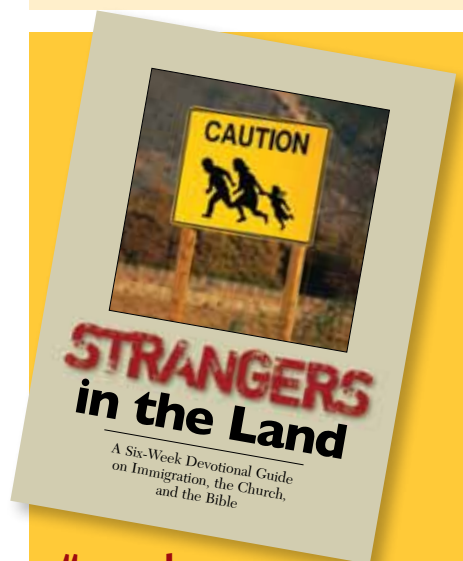
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Spring BOOKS

kind of surrender to evil."

Angelmaker contains a harrowing and psychologically vivid depiction of brutal interrogation and torture. It's profoundly affecting—and effective. I ask him how he feels about his fictional representation of torture given the torture-porn of TV shows such as *24*.

"I feel pretty robust about it—it's almost entirely from the character's point of view and it's presented as a supreme wickedness. We [in the democratic West] are casually abrogating long cherished rights and freedoms."

I ask Harkaway where this framework and worldview come from. He admits to a

great-grandfather who was a Congregational minister, though, being broadly agnostic, Harkaway avoids explicitly religious statements in his fiction.

"I give my stories a moral center, and it's essentially a pretty solid, recognizable one. My characters find themselves in a moral mess, but it's always pretty clear to us which way they should jump. Why? Well, partly because that provides a spine to the story. And partly because hey! After a day living in the real world, we deserve a rest. Not everything has to be complicated all the time." ■

Richard Vernon is a freelance writer in Brooklyn, New York.

FICTIONAL TRUTHS

Four novels with nothing in common except storytelling done well.

Girlchild, by Tupelo Hassman. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Despite unreliable—or worse—adults and generational scars, Rory Dawn finds small graces growing up in a Reno trailer park: an old Girl Scout handbook; flowers her mother coaxes from the desert soil; a school librarian's kindness. She threads her way to her grandmother's hope for her: "Someone's got to make it and it has to be you."



Nanjing Requiem: A Novel, by Ha Jin. Pantheon.

This fictional portrayal of the 1937 Japanese invasion of Nanjing, China, incorporates real history, including the story of Minnie Vautrin, an American missionary and the dean of Jinling Women's College. Vautrin helps shelter 10,000 people, who struggle for food and water and suffer assaults by Japanese forces. A harrowing story of brutality and sacrifice.

The Land of Decoration, by Grace McCleen. Henry Holt.

Judith McPherson, a lonely 10-year-old girl, lives with her widowed father and awaits the end of this world predicted by their fundamentalist sect. With candy wrappers and other discards, Judith creates another world in her room, the Land of Decoration. Then she discovers her seemingly God-given powers to make miracles happen, and chaos threatens.

Silver Sparrow, by Tayari Jones. Algonquin Books.

Out soon in paperback, this story is told from the perspective of the two teenage daughters of a bigamist—one from his "secret family" and one from his public one; one growing up knowing she's living in shadows and deception, the other unaware of the lies undergirding her life. A nuanced portrait of young women in extraordinary circumstances, their mothers, and their shared family members' complicity in deception.

—Compiled by Julie Polter

College Students Find Life 'Better Together'

BOTH COLLEGE AND religion are in the news as I write. Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum called Barack Obama's faith "phony theology" and spoke of campuses as "indoctrination mills."

Our main partners in interfaith cooperation at Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) are college campuses, and as founder and president I've set foot on dozens and worked indirectly with hundreds more. My experience offers a very different perspective than Santorum's. With the right leadership, curriculum, and activities, campuses are places where people can deepen their faith identities and learn the very American art of interfaith bridge-building. In fact, campuses are environments that can model this interfaith bridge-building for the rest of society, a place where students can learn the knowledge base and skill set of interfaith leadership.

Gathering people from different faiths to serve others is a way to live out Jesus' command to offer comfort to the afflicted.

Take the University of Illinois, for instance, where interfaith cooperation has been a priority for the better part of a decade. The student leaders of Interfaith in Action include evangelicals, Jews, humanists, Muslims, and Hindus. Together, they mobilized thousands of volunteers from different traditions to package more than 1 million meals for Haiti in the aftermath of the tragic 2010 earthquake. The group is now coordinating a spring conference that will empower student leaders from around the country to engage people of different faiths



and act together on pressing issues such as hunger and homelessness. One of the leaders of the effort, Greg Damhorst, told me he does interfaith organizing because gathering people from different faiths to serve others is one way of living out the command of Jesus to offer comfort to the afflicted.

Students elsewhere are taking the lead in building relationships across faith lines on campus. Mason Sklut, a Jewish student at Elon University in North Carolina, faced anti-Semitic harassment so harsh as an eighth grader that he transferred to a new school. Now, as an organizer of Elon's Better Together interfaith action campaign, he is breaking down the same bigotry he confronted as a child. Mason is welcomed when he shares what it means to be Jewish with students of other backgrounds. "Through Better Together at Elon," Mason says, "I have been able to forge relationships with Muslims, Jews, Christians, and students of all faiths and traditions in an accepting and ever-growing multicultural environment." He is living out

his Jewish values, battling anti-Semitism, and building America, all because of the resources offered on his campus.

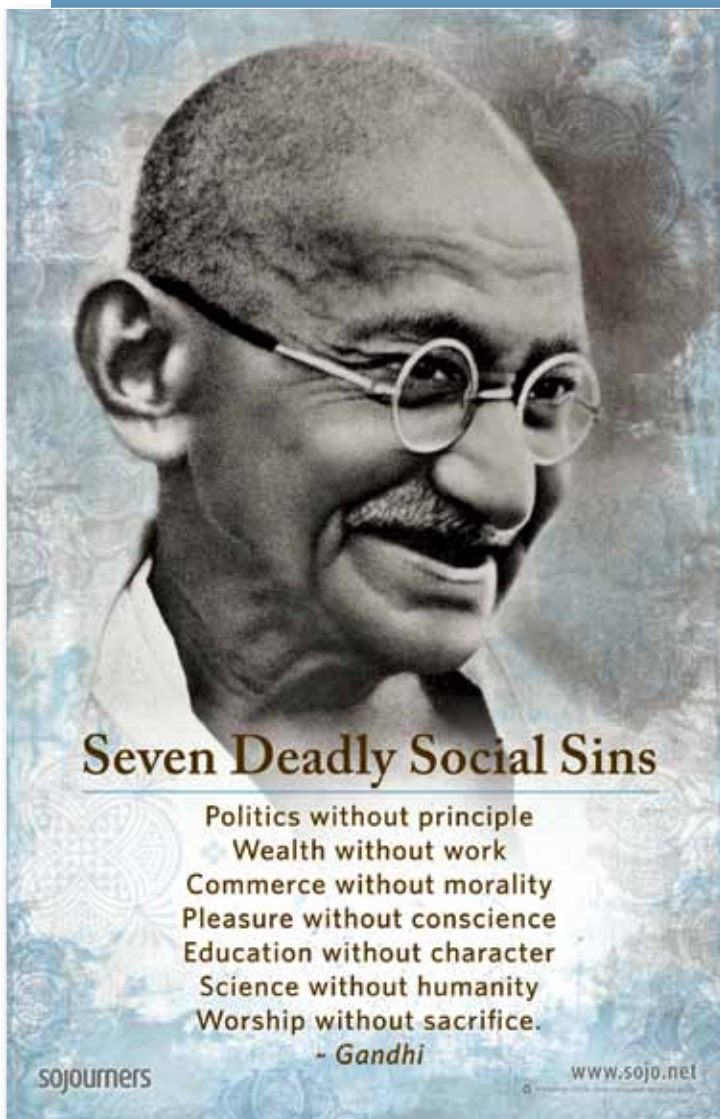
Then there are students like Rachel Hyden, who come to college without knowing much about religion. Raised in a household where religion was never discussed, she came to Ohio University with little knowledge of the many faith traditions that were so important to her fellow students. Through her commitment to building bridges and to growing her own interfaith literacy, Rachel

has become more comfortable with a personal faith identity that does not have a label or title. That identity inspired her to coordinate a 9/11 Peace Walk that built trust and understanding across faith lines.

These communities and leaders show us that when presidential candidates are dismissive toward college campuses and derogatory to the faith identity of other candidates, they do a disservice to the core value of pluralism in America. It is college campuses that have the opportunity to hold up that core value by positively engaging religious diversity. I hope, as we continue in this campaign season, that our presidential candidates lift up students like Mason and Rachel as examples of the unique opportunity we have on college campuses to nurture interfaith leaders and build interfaith cooperation. ■



Eboo Patel is founder and executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core and author of Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation.



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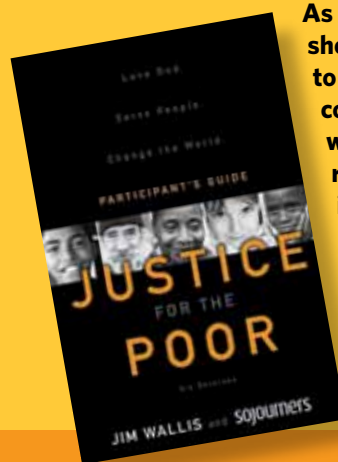
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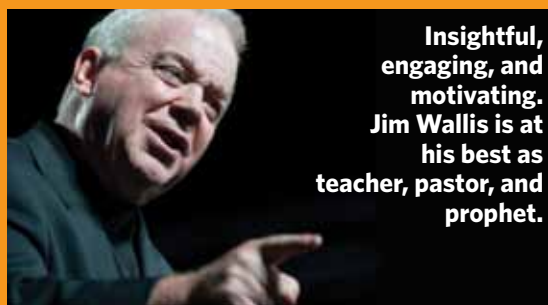


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Into the Dark Woods

DURING LENT I occasionally choose a gospel companion to guide me through the season. I slip in behind one character or another in the Passion narrative and walk with them on the road to Jerusalem. One year it was Mary of Magdala. Another, Claudia, wife of Pontius Pilate.

This year I was drawn to Mark's "certain young man"—the one who flees naked from the violence in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (14:51-52), leaving behind his linen cloth.

Scholars vehemently disagree about who this young man was. Many deduce that it's the writer of Mark's gospel inserting himself into the story. Others say he is reminiscent of King David fleeing from Absalom on the the Mount of Olives. Or that he foreshadows the "young man" in a white robe who will meet the women at Jesus' tomb.

Whoever he was, in the midst of an encounter with violence, this "certain young man" lost what thin protection he had and fled into the



Olive Grove Orange Sky, by Vincent Van Gogh

The thin cloth of protection that allows us to believe "if we weren't there things would be worse" slips to the ground.

The U.S. attorney general explains in a logical manner why it is legal and lawful in some circumstances for a U.S. president to order the "targeted killing" of an American citizen. These deaths shouldn't be called "assassinations," the attorney general says, because assassinations are "unlawful killing" and, if the president approves it, then it's not "unlawful." More veils fall—"a person is innocent until proven guilty"; "intelligent people will make morally right decisions." Our soul runs terror-stricken into the dark woods; our complicity with evil simply too much to bear.

THOMAS MERTON describes these moments as encounters with the Unspeakable. "It is the emptiness of 'the end,'" Merton writes. "Not necessarily the end of the world, but a theological point of no return, a climax of absolute finality in refusal, in equivocation, in disorder, in absurdity ..."

In the face of the Unspeakable, our nakedness is complete. All meaning is stripped away. Our carefully collected coverings lie in a heap. We are running into a silent, disorienting night.

Merton writes that the emptiness of the Unspeakable "can be broken open again to truth only by a miracle, by the coming of God." This is the Easter story. This is our resurrection hope.

In utter exhaustion, we begin to feel the coolness of the night air chilling our exposed skin. The musty scent of olive leaves rises up from the ground. Moonlight uncovers a barely discernible trail through the woods. Night birds chitter in the branches, calling to one another for comfort. Ahead there is a campfire in the rocks. Still naked and bleeding we move closer.

Jesus turns his face to us. "Come. Sit by the fire. Let me get you something to eat." ■



Rose Marie Berger, author of *Who Killed Donte Manning?* (available at store.sojournal.net) is a Catholic peace activist and a Sojourners associate editor.

The moral high ground sinks into a thicket of gray.

night, into the *selva oscura*, as Dante calls it, those "dark woods." Toward what, we do not know.

AS THE HUMAN soul matures, we are confronted with moments that force us to let go of yet another thin veil of self-delusion. The "right road," the moral high ground, sinks into a thicket of gray.

Two examples from this Lent: An American Army staff sergeant, with four deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and probable concussive brain trauma, allegedly pulls 16 unarmed Afghan civilians, including nine children, out of their beds in the middle of the night and shoots them.

Retired Aerospace Engineer joins the “Nature of God” debate.

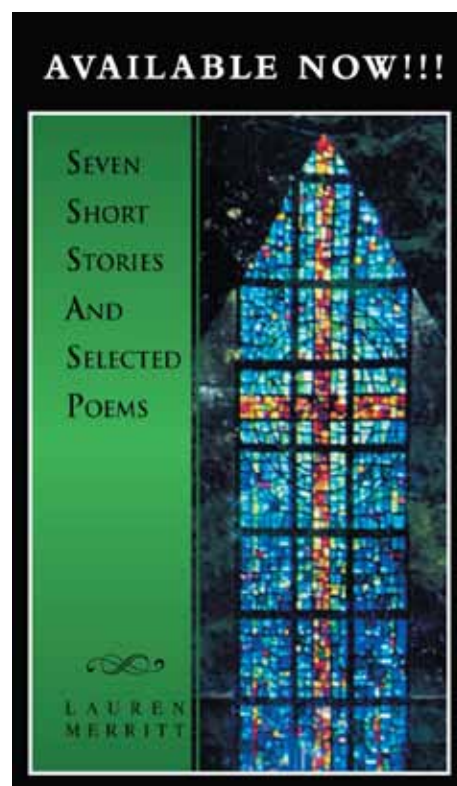
In author Lauren Merritt's new and opulent offering, *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems*, he leaves behind the world of aerospace engineering and veers into the ancient debate of the nature of God. This collection of short stories and related poetry comes out in favor of “I am is God” which appeals to people who have had enough of the trappings of our present day religious organizations. He does this through relentless examination of his own spiritual journey towards self-awareness unleashing merciless insight, fiery wit, and fierce compassion through illuminating narratives and verses.

Born out of the author's creative mind, *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems* features stories of heroes and heroines, love, lust and loss, reason and insanity, innocence and impurity. No matter the situation in which his protagonists find themselves – Adam's endless search for Eve, one listless child's longing for a complete family, a PTSD patient's effort to overcome his trauma, one man's participation in a ceremonial dance, a father's lifetime of memories unearthed, a couple's unfinished love affair – Merritt conveys their experience with endless wit and flowing prose that reminds readers, page by page, of the beauty of the written word.

These *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems* can be read as a literary journal of a great writer's career, beginning with a stance that is cold, bitter and intellectual to one that is warm, inviting, and comforting. From the spiritual journey perspective, Merritt's engineering knowledge of intellectual constructs allows him to steer away from rocky shores and sandy shoals to provide a clean, fresh, perspective to a rather ancient concept of God.

Lauren Merritt started his career earning a BSEE and MSE from the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Calif. His designs are now circling the earth, rusting away on the moon, and drifting away far beyond the orbit of Pluto. His career was cut short, having accumulated 12 patents and written 13 trade journal articles, in 2004 due to the onset of Parkinson's disease. He has published a book of his poetry and continues to write poems and a weekly newsletter for Valley Presbyterian Church of Portola Valley, Calif. where he serves as Poet Laureate.

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Death by Individualism

CHILDHOOD VACCINATIONS

have been a rite of passage for decades now. But in recent years, growing numbers of parents have refused to go along. A movement that began in the 1980s over adverse reactions to the diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP) and mumps, measles, and rubella (MMR) shots started to become a tidal wave in 1998. That's when a British researcher, Andrew Wakefield, published a study allegedly linking childhood vaccinations to autism.

A decade later, an anti-vaccination trend had spread into a broad swath of educated, upper-middle-class Americans inclined toward "alternative" lifestyles. It has been especially strong in the Pacific Northwest. In one county in Washington state, according to the February 2012 *New England Journal of Medicine*, 72 percent of kindergarteners and a whopping 89 percent



Vaccine Resistance Movement

Now doctors and state governments are pushing back, and a new round in the vaccination war has begun. Washington now requires a doctor's signature on those philosophical exemptions. In March, the Vermont Senate repealed the state's philosophical exemption. All over the country, family doctors and pediatricians are refusing to see patients who don't comply with vaccinations.

The issue of vaccinations and public health supplies us with a perfect example of the deep and ongoing American conflict between individualism and the common good. We submit our children to the pain of an injection not just to protect them, but to protect the whole population, including the very young, very old, or very ill, who can't be protected by vaccines. This requires us to place the good of the group over our own comfort or convenience and that of our children. It requires us to defy the siren song of individualism.

Individualism has long been both the blessing and the curse of American life. The belief that the individual is the final arbiter of his or her own destiny has given us a culture in which ordinary people have regularly done extraordinary things. On the other hand, that same unshakeable belief in personal freedom left

many of us worshipping the twin gods of Autonomy and Choice, whose blessing entitles us to eat whatever pleases us, choose to go without health insurance, or refuse to vaccinate our children, all with no regard for the costs those choices might impose upon our fellow citizens, much less future generations.

An observer from post-revolutionary France, Alexis de Tocqueville, spotted this problem among us way back in the 1830s. In *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville wrote that individualism is a "feeling which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself." He continued, "individualism, at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness."

De Tocqueville thought Americans would ultimately avoid that final descent into selfishness, but he may have been wrong. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. His latest book is a novel, *White Boy*.



There is no vaccine against selfishness.

of sixth graders were not fully vaccinated. Under pressure from this new constituency, many jurisdictions made it easier to get vaccine exemptions, adding to the existing "religious" exemption a new one for "philosophy" or "personal beliefs."

Then, in 2011, the Wakefield autism study that had sparked the anti-vaccination movement was completely discredited. The British medical journal *The Lancet*, which had published Wakefield's article on his findings, officially retracted it. That should have been that. But it wasn't. In the last year public health advocates have learned the hard way that once something is on the internet it never goes away and, as one scientist told PBS' *Frontline*, "People were much more likely to believe something they had seen on YouTube than the Centers for Disease Control."

New Wind, New Flesh

EXPERIMENTS IN MY first science class at school left an indelible impression on my imagination. I was particularly fascinated when the physics teacher covered a hefty bar magnet with a sheet of paper and then sprinkled iron filings over it. We made the filings jump about by banging the table and when they fell back they aligned themselves into a graceful fern-like pattern, revealing the invisible lines of force emanating from the magnet below. That's why I love this sentence from the Easter sermon in John Updike's novel *A Month of Sundays*: "Still to this day ... the rumor lives, that something mitigating has occurred, as if just yesterday, to align, like a magnet passing underneath a paper heaped with filings, the shards of our confusion, our covetousness, our trespasses on the confusions of others, our sleepless terror and walking corruption."

Again in Eastertide we sense that the resurrection of Jesus has started to pull the scattered impulses of our lives into a new pattern. We realize afresh that Christian life is essentially powered by hope, a passion for the unprecedented, possibilities for life in our world that have never been seen before. We recall that Christian life is not a religious ideology to be propagated, but an actual incorporation into the person of the risen Christ and an intimate experience of divine indwelling, through the Spirit active and present in the heart and in our relationships.



Martin Smith is an Episcopal priest serving at St. Columba's Church in Washington, D.C.

[MAY 6]

Sink Deep Your Roots

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

THE SCRIPTURES OF Eastertide are already full of the Spirit's action. The Spirit urges Philip to connect with the official traveling back to Africa. In the Spirit, Philip is able to bring the traveler to recognize that the pattern of suffering, reconciling love found in the puzzling Isaiah passage has reached its climactic demonstration in the recent death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. All he has to do is embrace that same pattern of life in Christ, and he is ready to be baptized into that new identity.

In 1 John 4, the re-centering of our identity around the indwelling Spirit and our union with the risen Christ are two sides of one Easter experience. "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" (verse 13). Far from leaving the cross out, this new pattern of identity is suffused with awareness of the severity of the human predicament, the pain of divine love, and the costliness of reconciliation. "In

this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (10).

Our gospel reading about abiding in Jesus as the true vine has a powerful resonance for Christians who are passionate about social justice. It tells us how essential it is to have a profound sense of being rooted and grounded—if our work for justice is to be enduring. The practices of solidarity and action for change are not immune from losing their grounding in the mystical core of the gospel. They can mutate into oppositional ideology and utopian posturing. The prophet Charles Péguy reminded us how social movements tend to become unmoored from their core *mystique* and degenerate into the futility of mere *politique*. Our work will be fruitless unless union with Christ becomes instinctive. That is the only identity robust enough to give lasting force to our action as witnesses to God's transformative desire.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at www.soj.net/ptw.

[MAY 13]

Faith Conquering the World?

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

DO YOU SOMETIMES shudder at the vulnerability of the word of God to tragic misunderstanding? The elder John in his letters speaks of our faith as "the victory that conquers the world" (1 John 5:4). That kind of language was horribly misappropriated to justify Christendom, a territorial Christianity bent on the subjugation of the "heathen," expanding through crusades. It lurks behind the story of Constantine's vision of the cross at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and the supposed message from heaven: "In this sign, conquer!" Even today militant evangelical Christianity can speak of conquering the world for Christ in a way that reeks of triumphalism. In the gospel it is costly non-violence that the resurrection reveals as the divine energy capable of outlasting and facing down the world's devices of institutionalized violence and unearned privilege.

In John's gospel about the commandment to love one another, we hear Jesus reshaping traditional religious language. What could be more orthodox than the rhetoric of obedience to divine commandments? Yet here the feel of that language is radically new. Obedience is re-forged in the context of intimacy. To obey is to accept the responsibility of close friendship with Christ. Far from blind obedience, true obedience grows through intimate communion with Christ, who shares with his friends his own inner conversation with God.

[MAY 20]

Acting on the Resurrection

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

IN ACTS, LUKE reports that the 11 disciples acted swiftly to replace Judas and bring their number back to 12. Jesus had appointed the 12 to symbolize God's restoration of God's people, with new founders for all 12 tribes, and the apostles needed to make sure that symbol still spoke loud and clear. God was

re-creating a people through resurrection, fulfilling Ezekiel's vision in the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37). The resurrection of Jesus was the sign that this re-creation was now underway. That's why it was essential to choose someone who not only had been a companion of Jesus, but who also could bear eyewitness testimony to the resurrection.

Luke packs into the appointment of Matthias key words about Christian leadership: *episcopē* ("oversight"), *diakonia* ("service"), and *apostole* ("authorized agency"). This highlights the relevance of this Easter story to our contemporary efforts to grasp the core qualifications for Christian leadership. Our leaders must be primarily witnesses to God's transformation of the world inaugurated by Jesus' resurrection, in which we are participating as active agents.

John's gospel makes us eavesdroppers, listening in on the impassioned prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper, in which he sums up the motives and desires at the heart of his life and impending death. Jesus recalls that his intimate followers "do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world" (John 17:14). What is this powerful non-belonging? It is not isolation and detachment ("I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one" John 17:15.) Rather, it is the gift of being liberated from the limitations of the present world order, which ruthlessly sustain discrimination between the haves and the have-nots, rulers and ruled, those in control and those destined for passivity and conformity. Not belonging to the world is the freedom to envision a new world, to see *through* confining structures of privilege, class, and wealth for what they are under God's judgment: obsolete.

[MAY 27]

Re-creation and Reckoning

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-35b;
Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

ON THE FEAST of Pentecost we celebrate the irruption of the Spirit, God's re-creative energy that subverts convention and blows our life open to the divine winds of change.

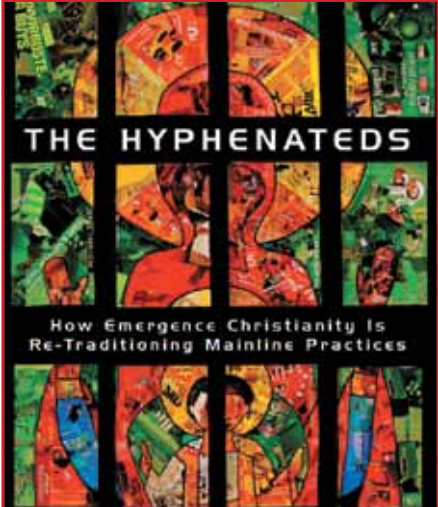
I celebrate Pentecost by praying a poem by Rilke, "A Spring Wind," in which there are lines that express beautifully the Christian experience of receiving through the Spirit our real identity, pregnant with new possibilities: an identity not based on the past, on our origins, our ancestry, our allotted place in society, but on the part we are being given in the realization of God's future.

"Oh, this new wind is bringing from afar, swaying with the freight of nameless things designed us, over the ocean, *what we are ...*"

The imagery in Luke's account of Pentecost expresses the unleashing of these new possibilities. In this new reality ignited by new fire, each person is endowed with a gift. No single nationality or ethnicity is superior to another; all hear the gospel in their own cultural idioms. Every talent for vision is being kindled and recruited, so that all who used to be regarded as superfluous now find vital roles. The Spirit is poured out on *all flesh*, a revolutionary end to the old ways of reserving spirituality and authority to the few. Sons and daughters prophesy now, the young as well as the old, and men and women in bondage as a voiceless underclass now step forward as bearers of Spirit.

No wonder the bursting forth of the Spirit is portrayed as the onset of judgment! If God is empowering the powerless, how can this not be a judgment on systems bent on keeping them powerless? Luke has to include the traditional symbolism of apocalyptic upheaval from the prophet Joel. Pentecost is an earth-shaking judgment on the old order, the dawning of what prophets called "the day of the Lord," the day of reckoning for the powers that be.

When will we hear this judgment theme in our own churches at Pentecost? Notice how it is reinforced by the passage in John's gospel, which insists that the Spirit delivers judgment as surely as it inaugurates liberation. Jesus proclaims at the Last Supper that the Advocate "will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned" (John 16:8-11). ■



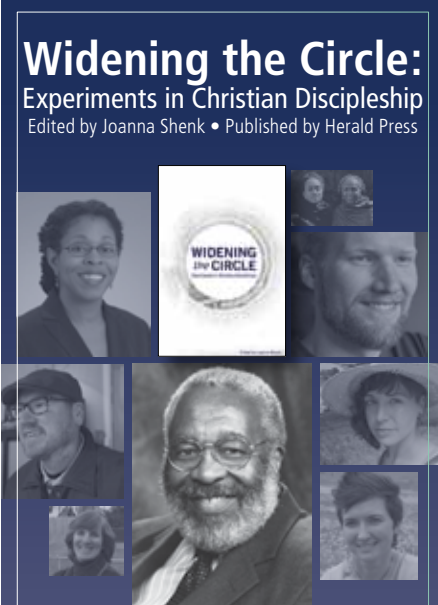
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Like Father, Like Sun...

BELATED CONGRATULATIONS

to North Korea's new leader, the 20-something Kim Jong Un, whose exact age is being withheld while government officials review celestial events to choose which one specifically heralded his immaculate birth. This precedent was set earlier by Kim's charismatic father, Kim Jong Il, who, according to North Korean textbooks, was born during the appearance of a new star. North

student can tell you, it's better to be *in* the history books than stuck in a campus Starbucks reading them.

I'm wondering if Kim will continue the powerful reminder of his nation's nuclear capability by adopting his dad's mushroom-cloud hairstyle. I notice this kind of thing because I, too, have bad hair. But, sadly, I have no nuclear weapons to casually mention to people making fun of me at a party. "Oh yeah? What's your address again?

quite impressive, although I have to admit I was trying to make a bunny.)

Mylar balloons are preferable since they deflate over time, like Michele Bachmann or, after some noticeable hissing, like Herman Cain. Unfortunately, mylar balloons spend their final days about waist high, drifting from room to room, with no purpose except to scare the crap out of you.

On numerous occasions I have attempted to euthanize this menace, only to quickly put the scissors behind my back when the granddaughter toddles in and gives Elmo a hug. So it remains a ghostly presence in my home, floating malevolently, a reminder of Sesame Street's hideous dark side.

Sometimes it follows me, caught up in my natural wake, or it enters a room pushed by some unseen current, bumping against my leg, or passing just inside my peripheral vision. Where once Birthday Elmo brought the laughter of children to our home, Elmo's Floating Head of Death now bobs and weaves in the dark corridors of my house, appearing when I least expect it, seemingly out of nowhere, a spectral intruder, or perhaps some unspecified carnivore, or worse—a young dictator with a mushroom cloud on his head! (If you're reading this, for heaven's sake, send help! Something sharp would be nice.) ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Becoming a dictator is a great way to get out of homework.

Korean textbooks also stated that Il was an excellent golfer and that he produced no urine or feces—a helpful combination if you're playing 18 holes without a cart.

The young Kim's inauguration was done in typical North Korean modesty, with thousands of identically dressed people filling the square in Pyongyang, moving in perfect synchronization to honor the new leader and, secondarily, to celebrate the fact they'd all eaten beforehand. Regular meals is what they get in Pyongyang, as opposed to citizens in the rest of the country, who eat—as human rights groups have documented—less often.

Kim reportedly had very mixed feelings about the impending death of his father and his quick return from the Swiss boarding school where he had been living. He'll miss his dad, of course, but he got out of final exams. And as any college

Anywhere within a 50-mile radius would be fine."

(In related news, North Korea is actually willing to cease nuclear testing in exchange for food shipments, which reduces the nuclear threat considerably, and minimizes the role of North Korea in international affairs. So Kim might have to go back and take his finals after all. Bummer.)

I'M STRUCK BY Kim's appearance—his roundish face and unchanging expression—because it reminds me of the Elmo birthday balloon that has been terrorizing our home the past few weeks.

Standard balloons are considered dangerous for toddlers, who could ingest pieces of plastic if they explode when, say, a grandfather is trying to fashion clever animal shapes too close to the stove. (Not to brag, but my three-legged llama is



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